

ONCE  
IN A  
LIFE



CHARLES GARVICE

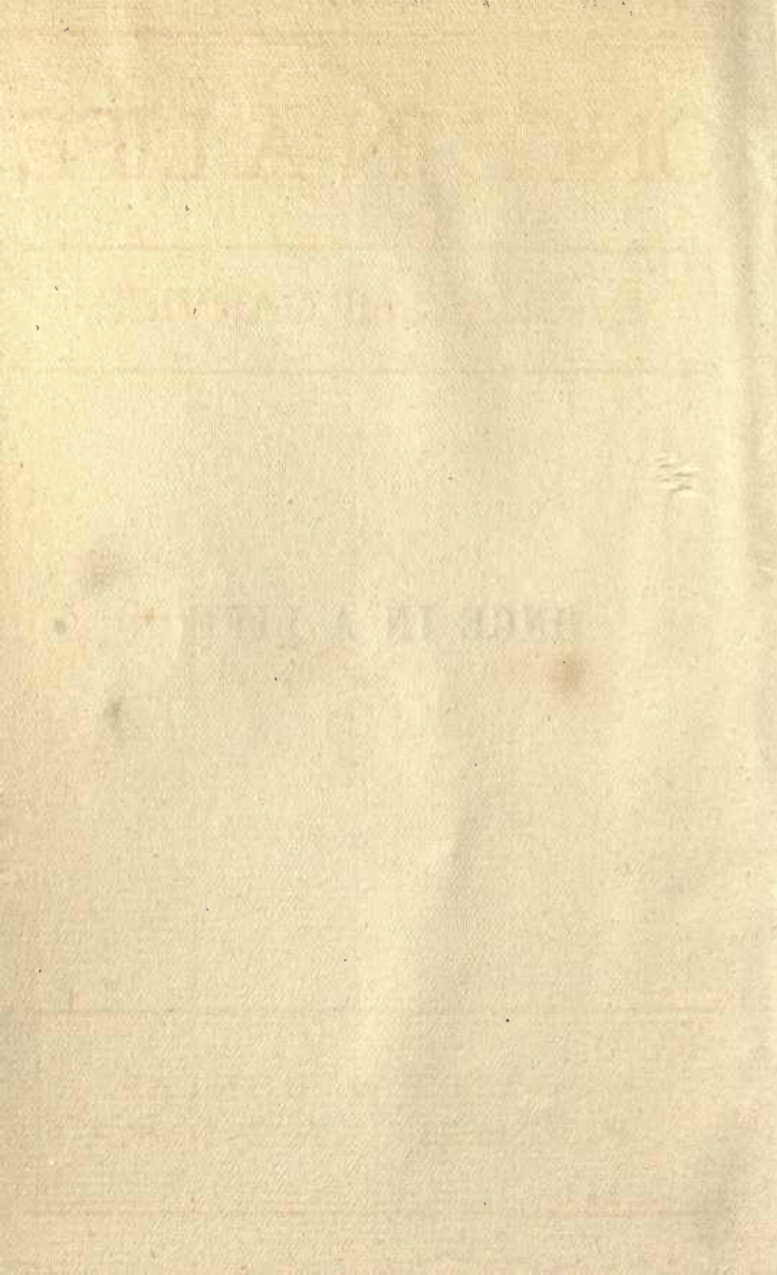








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By CHARLES GARVICE

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### CHAPTER I.

THE Spaniards, who have always a proverb on their lips, are particularly partial to this one:

“God makes woman perfect; man spoils her; love redeems her.”

If you leave the town of Barnstaple on your right, and walk a matter of a mile or two, you come upon a scene which will, according to your temperament and the state of the tide, either make you shudder and turn back appalled, or rivet your attention and cause you to linger with a kind of fascination as indescribable as it is irresistible. For it is just here that the bed of the river Taw widens, presenting, at high tide, a broad stretch of water pleasant to look upon, but at low tide a reach of sand which is the embodiment of desolation and solitude.

The reach of sand goes down to the sea, which at neap-tide sometimes crawls up it like a weary snake, but at spring-tide comes tearing up like a wild beast rushing with an ominous and deadly silence upon its prey.

Nine persons out of ten who stand and look, at low tide, at this waste of salt-sand and listen to the cry of the sea-birds which soar across the waste, sometimes swooping down upon the fish in the shallow pools, or upon the sand eels that vainly try to burrow out of sight, would shiver, shudder and hurry back to the comfortable inn at Barnstaple—which is a pity; for if they would only walk half a mile along the bank, going toward the sea, they would come upon a scene which, for sheer out-and-out loveliness, they would find it hard to match. They would find a little valley verdant as the Emerald Isle itself, with softly covered hills on either side, with a rippling brook, with birds tamer and sweeter of song than the guillemots; with everything, in short, which the poet and painter insists upon having.

In this valley, close to the mouth of the brook, stands a mill;



say, rather, hides, for you can not see it from the river-bank, and the trees round it shut it from the view of the hills. At one time it was, in a very small way, a flourishing little mill. Farmers brought their wheat there to be ground; the wheel spun round merrily and industriously; the miller and his man, both white with flour, sung cheerily.

But the mill has long been motionless, the machinery is rusty, and though the water still trickles over the broken wheel, it does so in a sleepy, lazy fashion, and with a subdued murmur. The neighboring farmers no longer bring their wheat there to be ground; have, indeed, most of them, forgotten that the mill exists; though within a few miles of the busy town it is so "remote" that it might be a hundred miles distant. The cart road is overgrown with weeds and grass, through which only a narrow footpath is visible. No one has any business to transact there, so no one comes, excepting, perhaps, the ubiquitous tourist; and he only stands and stares about him for awhile, and then, perhaps oppressed by the silence and the solitude, tramps off to better-known and duly advertised spots.

In this mill cottage lived Edwin Chester and his daughter Lyra.

He had come to the cottage and its ruined mill some ten years before this story opens, when Lyra was a slip of a girl in the "all legs and wings" stage. No one knew anything about him, no one cared. Father and daughter settled down alone and unaided, and had continued to live in the little out-of-the-way valley in solitary unfriendliness.

It is a way failures have. For the man was a failure. He had started to make money, and failed; he had married to secure happiness, and failed; for his wife had died in giving birth to Lyra.

How many men, alas! lose their wives; but many, fortunately for them, live down their sorrow; but this man could not do so. He had loved his wife with all his heart and soul. She had been very beautiful, and she had loved him with a love almost as absorbing as his own. When she passed away she took his heart with her; it lay buried in her grave, and there it remained, notwithstanding Heaven had given him a daughter as lovely as her mother, and as lovable.

You see, he could never look upon Lyra's beautiful face without seeing the reflection of his dead wife's, without remembering what the child had cost him.

Shut up with his books, he lived the life of a recluse, shunning his fellow-men, speaking seldom, smiling never.

In the sole companionship of her father and a hunchbacked

old man, an old servant who had followed Mr. Chester in his ruin, Lyra had grown from childhood to that mystic state in which childhood stands palpitating 'twixt girl and woman.

She had no friends outside the cottage save the birds in the little wood behind the house, their wilder cousins sailing above the sands, the babbling brook, the flowers in the valley, the salt waves that, when the wind blew, turned the river into a mimic sea, and her books.

A girl must love something. Lyra loved her father and nature. Her father, unfortunately, could not return that love, but nature had responded, and responded generously.

It lavished its gifts upon her—had given her beauty far beyond the ordinary, had given her strength and health, and a nameless charm which, perhaps, the very conditions of her life had created and developed.

She was not above the average height, but exquisitely formed, with the lissom grace which belongs to those whose lives are spent in the open air, untrammelled and unburdened by such fashionable customs as tight-lacing, afternoon tea-drinking, late hours, and unhealthy excitement.

Her face, oval in shape, was one of those which one sees in the paintings of Murillo, the eyes dark and dreamy, yet with the "maiden fierceness" smoldering, as it were, within their depths. The mouth was not small by any means, but it spoke ere the words left her lips, so facile of expression was it. Her hair was of that dark rich brown which, because it has the gold and the russet of an autumn leaf in it, we call auburn, and there was so much of it that Lyra was often tempted to cut it off; for it got in her way when she was rowing the boat across the river to the little village of Peterel on the other side, and when the wind blew it about her face as she walked across the hills above the valley.

But if an artist would have fallen into a rapture at the beauty of her face, a musician would have been as delighted at the music of her voice. Naturally clear in tone, her life in these fogless regions, in which the sea and the moorland air combined, had made her voice full and round and bell-like; though she spoke in the low tones which become habitual to those who dwell far from the madding crowd.

In short, to sum up in the passionate words of an Elizabethan poet:

"Sweetness itself was she; none other in the world so sweet to me."

And all this sweetness was wasted on the desert air.

And yet Lyra did not complain, nor was she unhappy. How

can they be unhappy whom the gods have blessed with youth, and health, and strength, and a nature which can find something to love in the babbling brook, the singing birds, the flowing tide?

But these—and her books—were all Lyra had. Though her father had not forbidden her to go to the town, which, with its thin crown of filmy smoke, lay in the hollow of the hills, Lyra knew that he did not like her to go; and all her walks were taken over the hills, by the low river-banks, and up the leafy valley in which the cottage nestled; and if she wanted any other exercise, why, there was the boat, which she could sail, and row as skillfully, if not as strongly, as any fisherman on the estuary.

If sometimes, as she wandered over the hills or lay back in the drifting boat, she wondered what the great world was like, the world of which she read in her books, the wonder was untouched by discontent. She lived in a world of her own, a land of dreams, and it seemed as if the time of awakening, that hour in which the soul springs into passionate life, as that of the Sleeping Beauty was awakened by the kiss of the adventurous prince, would never dawn for her; as if all her life would pass away untroubled, eventless, in the secluded valley by the waste of sand and fast-flowing tide, innocent of all that makes the joy and the misery of her sisters in the great world far away.

God makes woman perfect; man spoils her; love redeems her. The hour was at hand.

One day in June, she stood at the door of the cottage, her slim figure, in its well-worn serge frock, drawn to its full height, as she held above her head a bowl of corn with which she was feeding a flock of pigeons that fluttered excitedly round her, so fearless in their affection and impatience that they stood upon her feet and buffeted with their wings her golden-tinged hair.

She knew them all by name, and chided them laughingly for their greediness, sometimes pushing them gently from her head, or as gently throwing them off the bowl with her hand. A hen and a brood of chickens clucked and chirped about her feet, and a dog, with the dog's cheerful readiness to take part in any noise, jumped up at her, barking and yelping lovingly.

The bent figure of an old, deformed and hunchbacked man came down the path beside the water-wheel, with a load of wood on his back, and paused to look at her with an expression of devotion on his warped face as dog-like in its intensity as the dog's own.



"Down! Carlo, down!" he said in a thin, strained voice, as if it came from his narrow chest with difficulty. "You let 'em tear you to pieces, Miss Lyra."

Lyra laughed softly. Her laugh was like her voice, full of music, but soft and subdued, as if she were more accustomed to laughing to herself for her only audience.

"No, no, Griffith," she said. "It is all right; he is doing no harm. Where are you going?" For he had put down the load of wood, and was going down the path that led from the house.

"The master wants something from Peterel."

Lyra flung the remains of the corn into the air.

"I'll go, Griffith," she said. "You are tired."

"No, no, Miss Lyra."

"But you are," she insisted. "I can see that by the way you walk; and you have carried that great pile of wood from the woods. I'll go; I should like the row. Now, don't be obstinate, there's a good Griffith. Besides, it isn't any use. I always have my way in the end, you know."

"Yes, Miss Lyra," he said, in a gentler voice than one would have deemed him capable of, judging by his rugged exterior, "and from the beginning. Well, I'll get the boat ready."

Lyra turned and entered the cottage. She moved quickly, though gracefully, with the gait of a girl whose limbs are under perfect command, and went into the little sitting-room, where her father was sitting reading, with the blinds down, as if he were desirous of shutting out the bright, warm June sunlight.

She glided up to him, and bending over him, put her arms round his neck. He suffered the caress of the sweet young arms, but did not return it.

"What is it you want at Peterel, father?"

He raised his eyes from the book and gazed before him, blinking vacantly.

"At Peterel? I want nothing. Yes, I remember; I want the London paper. They take it at Greely's farm. He offered to lend it to me whenever I wanted to see it."

Lyra laughed very softly.

"Yes, I recollect. But that was—what?—a year ago?"

"And I have not wanted to see it till now," he said, his eyes returning to his book.

"Very well, father," she said. "I don't suppose Mr. Greely has forgotten. Is there anything else?"

He looked up with weak impatience.

"What? Where are you going?" he asked, as if the subject had passed from his memory.

"To Peterel. All right, father." She touched his head with her lips—a kiss as light as thistle-down—and leaving the room, caught up the sun-browned, weather-stained hat, and ran down the path to where the brook emptied itself into the river.

The tide was coming up, creeping up slowly—for it was not a rushing spring-tide—and Griffith was standing keeping the boat afloat.

"I should think there's enough water for you to get across, Miss Lyra," he said, bending his shoulder for her to rest her hand upon as she sprung into the boat; and she did so rest her hand, though she did not need his assistance.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I sha'n't be gone long, Griffith; look after father."

He stood and watched her for a moment or two, then turned to the house, his lips moving with a "God bless her!" but in a voice that would have better harmonized with a curse—the harsh, guttural under-tone of the hunchback.

Lyra rowed against the incoming tide for a few minutes, then let the boat swing half round till its nose pointed to the opposite shore, and took it straight across.

She knew every inch of the river, knew where the sand raised itself into hillocks, upon which the boat, if not kept clear of them, would strike and stick fast, and in another ten minutes she had reached the opposite bank, pulled up the boat, and walked to the farm.

It was a small farm, lying almost close to the bank, and the farmer's wife had seen her coming across, and was out to meet her.

"Why, Miss Lyra, you be a stranger!" she exclaimed, wiping her hands on her apron, and looking up at the girl's lovely face with the wistful admiration of a woman from whom girlhood has gone forever. "You're looking bonny, too. Come in, come in."

As they entered the farm a batch of children came rushing out and surrounded Lyra, very much as the poultry had done a few minutes before.

She had a kind word for them all, and caresses for the youngest, who, caught up in her arms, threatened by its embraces to pull down the thick coil of leaf-brown hair, till restrained by her anxious mother.

"Put her down, Miss Lyra, put her down," she said. "Polly, how can you?"



"Never mind," said Lyra, laughing, as the hair at last came tumbling down. "It doesn't matter. I can wind it up; besides, there is no one to see me."

She made the observation artlessly enough, but the woman sighed regretfully as she echoed it.

"No, there's no one to see you, miss, more's the pity," she said.

Lyra did not notice the response or its tone, and made her request for the paper.

"The newspaper! Yes, Miss Lyra, certainly. Now, where did I see it? Joseph was reading it last night in that chair. Oh! here it is. Lor'! it isn't often Mr. Chester asks to see the paper. Hope it isn't bad news he's expecting, Miss Lyra?"

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## CHAPTER II.

"BAD news?" said Lyra, rather vaguely. Two children were in her lap, and the others were clustering round her. "No; I think not. I don't think my father expects any news at all. We never hear any."

"You never go into the town, Miss Lyra?"

Lyra shook her head.

"Never," she said. "Now, Johnny, I'll tell you the story of your namesake, the giant-killer. Well, come on my knee, then. I think we can make room; can't we, Polly?"

While she told the grand old story, Mrs. Greely hastened to get a cup of tea. They give you tea in Devonshire at all hours, just as in the Rhine provinces they give you wine. If you rushed into a Devonshire cottage to tell them that the world was coming to an end, they would insist upon you taking tea, cakes, and cream.

Lyra drank her cup of tea, and with the folded paper in her pocket went back to the boat.

The tide had been flowing silently, steadily, and the sand-banks in the river-bed had disappeared. She got into the boat, pushed off, and began to row for the opposite shore.

For perhaps the first time in her life she—Lyra, the Taw maiden—miscalculated the height of the tide. Thinking that she could row straight across as the crow flies, she pulled a vigorous, careless stroke, and lo! in midstream the keel of the boat struck one of the sand-banks, the boat swung round, and there she was, aground!

She jumped up and tried to push it off into deep water; but she had rowed hard, and the keel was imbedded in the soft, tenacious sand. There was nothing for it but to wait until

the tide flowed higher and floated her off. Accordingly, she leaned back in the stern of the boat to wait patiently.

The sun poured down upon her in a manner which would have filled a London beauty with despair; for, where the sun falls upon the human face divine, there grow freckles. But Lyra was indifferent to freckles, and the state of her complexion troubled her not, so the sun-god reveled in her beauty unchecked.

As she leaned back, gazing dreamily over the waste of waters, the sea-gulls hovered over her, wheeling in their flight, and uttering their weird, shrill cries; and one or two of the flock, made daring by her stillness and the brooding silence, swept down almost as low as her face.

The air was full of life and the delight of life; the sun stirred the young blood within her. She rose presently with an oar in her hand—not the light scull which ladies play with on smaller rivers, but a stout, serviceable, heavy oar—and shading her eyes with her hand, looked before her seaward. Then, as the gulls audaciously swooped round her, she dropped her oar, and waving her arms, shouted loudly, though musically, laughing, as the birds, scared by the sudden cry and movement, flew shrieking beyond her reach.

Now, five minutes before, while she had been lying dreaming in the stern of the boat, a young man had appeared on the bank. He had been walking briskly enough, with his back to Barnstaple, but with rather a careless and unobservant air. He was a remarkably good-looking young fellow, and, even for these days of athleticism, strikingly well made and stalwart.

He dressed in a knickerbocker suit of rough tweed, and he wore the suit as a gentleman does; with that air of unconscious ease which distinguishes the true gentleman from the make-believe. One would describe his appearance—the cleanly cut features, the steady but brilliant eye, the graceful form of the well-knit figure—as patrician; but, unfortunately, so many patricians nowadays possess anything but well-knit frames, brilliant eyes and cleanly cut features; indeed, a great many of them are too terribly commonplace in face, manner and appearance.

This young man strode along swinging his stick, and followed by a wiry fox-terrier, walking fast, but as if he were putting on the pace rather for his own amusement than an object, and with his eyes steadily fixed before him.

It was not until Lyra had rowed some distance from the opposite shore that he chanced to look that way and saw her.

He did not stop even then, but walked on, looking at her and admiring her long, steady strokes.

"Jove!" he said to himself, "wouldn't disgrace a 'varsity boat. If some of our fellows would come down to a place like this and take lessons of a fisherman—or a fisherman's daughter, for that matter—they'd get a sight of good."

As he made this wise reflection Lyra struck upon the sand-bank, and the stroke he had so much admired came to a sudden cessation.

He stopped and leaned on his stick.

"Run aground," he murmured. "Now I wonder whether she'll be able to get it off? The tide's rising, so she's all right, I suppose."

He stood watching, quite easy in his mind, until Lyra's sudden uprising and gesticulation.

Certainly, to a man standing at some distance from the boat, it looked as if the occupant had got into trouble, and had suddenly become painfully aware of the fact; in fact, it looked to him as if Lyra was in a terrible state of fright.

"George! something has happened," he exclaimed to himself; "she's lost her nerve, or the boat's keeling over and filling."

At that moment Lyra, all unconscious of a spectator and listener, uttered a louder cry and swung her arms above her head.

To him the cry was a cry for help, the gesture of one in despair.

"Yes," he said, "she's in a deuce of a fix. She's as likely as not to upset that cockle-shell, and then—"

He looked at the tide, now flowing fast and rather angrily, and then at the boat, and he lifted his voice in what he intended to be a shout of encouragement. Unfortunately for him, or for her—how fate mocks us!—the shrilling of the sea-gulls was in Lyra's ears, and she did not hear him, and as if in response to his shout, she uttered another cry.

"Well, there's nothing else for it," he said, with an air of resignation. "I don't mind a swim, though I should prefer it without my clothes. Bother the girl! I can't stand here and see her drown, and I suppose she will drown."

He took off his Norfolk jacket and waistcoat with a leisurely kind of quickness, and, after wading into the stream as far as he could, took to swimming, and swam toward the boat.

That is to say, he swam toward the boat for the first few yards; then the stream took hold of him bodily, irresistibly, and bore him upward.



"Confound it! who'd have thought it ran so hard?" he muttered.

But he fought against it with that stolid kind of steadfastness which distinguishes your practiced athlete, and just to let the damsel in distress know that he was hastening to her rescue, shouted to her encouragingly.

This time Lyra heard the shout, and turning her head, saw him—saw him with amazement, for never in her life before had she seen a man swimming in the tide-way of the Taw. For, sad to say, persons living by a river are not given to bathing.

She watched him with surprise and much interest; but suddenly the astonishment and interest changed to a deeper feeling.

Tidal rivers are dangerous for strangers. They are full of under-currents which, though unseen, are deadly strong, and as deadly deceitful. The young fellow was in the grip of one of these currents, and as she looked she saw him being borne along against his will, against his struggles.

Lyra knew that a man caught in such a current might fight in vain to reach the shore, that he might struggle and struggle until his breath and strength were gone, and then the swirling river would suck him under its deceitfully calm surface.

Her face grew pale, and for a moment she stood transfixed by his danger; then the blood rushing to her face with shame for her moment of irresolution, she caught up the oar, easily pushed the boat off the sand-bank, and rowed to the swimmer.

Perhaps because her heart was beating fast she did not row as strongly and steadily as usual, and the current—a different one to that in which the young man was struggling—bore her away from him.

Looking over her shoulder, she saw his head sinking lower, saw his strokes becoming more rapid—a mistake which a swimmer in difficulties always must make—and a low cry of alarm escaped her lips.

Then she set herself to her task, kept the nose of the boat straight, and sent it rushing through the water. She was almost within reach of him; she could see his face, pale but quite fearless, when he suddenly disappeared.

She did not cry out, but she held the boat up against the current, so that it might not pass over him, and leaned over the side.

She came up close to him. He was conscious still; she could see that much as she made a grasp at him; but the boat swerved, and he was swept beyond her reach.

Then she called to him, her clear voice thrilling above the swish of the tide against the sides of the boat:

"Keep still! Float! float!"

He must have heard her, or he followed the natural impulse of an accomplished swimmer, for he turned on his back. In another instant she had sent the boat toward him, and leaning over now, so that the gunwale almost touched the water, seized him by his shirt.

She held him by a grip like that of a vise, but she could not, of course, lift him.

"Cling to the boat!" she said.

He assented with a rather languid movement of his eyelids and what was intended for a smile, and he put up his hand and seized the side of the boat. She put her hand upon his—it struck very, very cold—as if she would hold him by sheer force; and so they drifted for a hundred yards.

Then he put up the other hand, and, as she careened the boat over to him, and put her strong young arms around him, he slowly and none too easily drew himself into it.

He lay at the bottom of the boat for some moments, panting like a man who had been run out of breath, then he rose into a sitting posture, and pushing the hair from his forehead, said, rather breathlessly:

"I'm afraid I don't understand the rules of this game."

Lyra looked at him. She was bending forward, the sculls in both hands keeping the boat straight. The color was coming and going in her face, her eyes were full of a divine pity, a human gratitude.

"What?" she murmured, faintly.

He hoisted himself upon the stern thwart.

"I beg your pardon, but I'm afraid I don't understand the rules of this game."

"Game!" she echoed, looking at him, the red dyeing her face one moment and fading the next.

"No," he said, with a laugh that was rather shaky. "You are all right, I hope?"

Lyra stared at him, her brows straightening. They were darker than her hair, and did marvelous things in the way of expression.

"I all right? I? Oh! yes, yes! But you—how could you—could you bathe in the river without knowing the currents?"

Then she stopped, as it struck her that he could not have intended to bathe in his clothes.

It was his turn to stare, and he took his innings to the full.

"Bathe!" he exclaimed. "How could I bathe!" Then



he burst into a laugh, a short, almost fierce laugh. "Well!—oh, I wish you weren't here!"

"Wish I weren't here!" Lyra's lips reformed his words.

"Yes; because I should like to swear—swear hard! But I beg your pardon," he said, abruptly. He had been looking at her, had seen by this time that she was no fisherman's daughter, no farm wench. "It was your joke, and you are fully entitled to it."

"My joke!" Lyra stopped rowing, and opened her lovely eyes upon him. "My joke! I don't know what you mean;" and there was a note of indignation in her amazement.

He wrung the water of the Taw from his shirt-sleeves and his knickerbockers, and laughed.

"Weren't you in difficulties?" he said. "But I see now you weren't. You pushed the boat off quite easily. I thought it was keeling over, that you were calling for assistance."

Lyra flushed crimson.

"I—I was calling to the birds, frightening the gulls," she faltered.

He stopped in his wringing process and gazed at her, and as he gazed, her beauty smote him more fully; he forgot her response almost in his intense appreciation of her fresh young loveliness.

"Calling to the gulls? Oh, by Jove!" and he laughed in self-derision. "I thought you were shouting for help."

"I?" said Lyra, open-eyed. "The boat was aground, and I had only to wait till the tide rose and floated it. And—and it was because you thought I was in danger that—that—"

He nodded as he took off his shoes and poured the water out of them. It is wonderful how much water a shoe will hold.

"Did you ever hear the story of the man in the train?" he asked.

She did not shake her head, but he took her silence as a confession of ignorance, and went on:

"A man in the train moaned or groaned. The passenger opposite him took out a flask of brandy and kindly offered it to him. The other fellow looked rather surprised, but took a drink and returned the flask. When they got to the terminus, the man who had offered his flask leaned forward and said:

" 'I hope you are better now.'

" 'Better?' said the other. 'Why, nothing is the matter with me. I'm not ill.'

" 'Not ill?' said the Good Samaritan. 'Why, I heard you groaning.'

“ ‘Groaning!’ exclaimed the other. ‘Oh, no! I was only singing.’ ”

Lyra smiled; she could not laugh. Through her brain—through her heart—ran the whisper: “He thought you were in danger; he has risked his life for you.” Then she said—and what a miserable commonplace it sounded:

“I—I am afraid you are very wet.”

He laughed.

“Yes, that about describes my condition;” but his careless tone changed, under the tender expression in her eyes, to a more serious one. “There’s nothing in that. I was just looking out for an excuse for a swim, and, really and truly, I’m immensely obliged to you. But I’m afraid I’ve given you a great deal of trouble and a fright into the bargain. I didn’t take the current into consideration.”

Lyra’s face grew a shade paler, and her eloquent eyes drooped—hid themselves behind their lids, lest he should see the emotion in them.

“You—you were nearly—”

She could not go on.

“Nearly done, do you mean?” he said, carelessly. “Yes, I suppose I was. I don’t know why, for I’m not a bad swimmer. The sudden cold of the water after the heat—and I fancy I felt a touch of cramp.” Lyra shuddered. “But please—*please* don’t be concerned about me; I’m all right,” he laughed. “I shall be dry before we get to the shore.”

A silence fell upon them both. She rowed on; he sat pressing the water from his shirt-sleeves and smoothing his short hair, which seemed to be almost dry already.

Lyra looked at him without seeming to look at him. All women—the most innocent and unsophisticated—know how to perform this trick; they learn it in their cradles.

She noticed the fashion of his garments; the shapely, sun-tanned hands, with the thick gold ring on the fourth finger of the left; the handsome face, with its short-cut, military-looking mustache; the dark eyes, brilliant again now.

She had never in all her life seen any man like this one; and he—well, he could not, like a woman, “look without looking;” but as he sat there he was conscious of the lovely face, of the grace of the lithe figure, of the half-proudly shy, half-grateful light in the lovely eyes; and for the first time in his life, this man—not a very good man, by the way; a man who knew all the ways of this wicked world of ours—felt subdued and quieted.

The boat touched the shore, and, as if awaking from a spell,

he leaped out and offered her his hand. She just touched it and stood at his side.

"No, no," he said, as she began to pull the boat in; and silently she stood aside and let him do it.

"My coat and waistcoat are along there," he said. "I'll"—for perhaps the first time in his life his voice faltered in addressing a woman—"I'll wish you good-afternoon."

She stood with downcast eyes for an instant; then she raised them, but did not look at him, but at the opposite shore.

He took her silence for his dismissal.

"Yes. Good-afternoon. I'd thank you for saving my life"—she turned to him with a swift, eloquent protest—"but I know you wouldn't care for that sort of thing; nobody does. 'Pon my word, I don't know why, most people set a goodly store by their lives, and fight hard enough for them!"

Lyra opened her lips as if about to speak, but at the instant footsteps sounded behind them, and the thin, bent figure of her father came up.

"Have you got the paper, Lyra?" he said, as if the presence of the young man were unnoticed by him.

"Yes, father," she said. Her voice faltered slightly, and she waved her hand toward the stranger, as if calling her father's attention to him.

Mr. Chester raised his lack-luster eyes and blinked.

"He has been nearly drowned," said Lyra, trying to speak carelessly, coolly—why, she could not have told.

"That's true, sir," said the young man; "and should have been quite, but for your daughter."

Mr. Chester blinked at him in silent apathy for a moment, as if nearly drowned young men were always on supply.

"Yes," he said, dreamily. "You had better come in and dry your clothes."

The young fellow hesitated, and looked from Lyra to her father, and then at the river, and at his own boots, and then at Lyra again, while the fox-terrier yapped quite plainly, "Why don't you accept?" She stood silent, motionless, palely statuesque. The woman who hesitates is lost; how much more often is she lost when the man hesitates!

"Thanks!" he said, at last, and almost curtly. "I think I will." And so the hour of Lyra's awakening was on the point of striking.



## CHAPTER III.

THE young man followed Mr. Chester into the cottage. Lyra remained by the boat for a few minutes, looking dreamily across the river to the spot where she had snatched him out of the jaws of death; then she too entered the house and found the other two engaged in discussing the young fellow's wet clothes.

"I don't know what's to be done," Mr. Chester was saying in a rather querulous tone. "You must be wet—very wet, of course, and ought to dry your things. But I don't know what you are to wear; you couldn't get into anything of mine, and there's no one else. You wouldn't like to go to bed, I suppose?" he suggested.

The young fellow laughed. He was seated by the window in the hot sunlight, and seemed to be as much at ease as if he had known his host for years.

"I certainly should not," he said. "Please don't trouble about me. My things are nearly dry by this time, and if they weren't it wouldn't matter. It's salt water, you know; and, besides, I'm used to getting wet; I'm always wading about when I'm fishing. It doesn't in the least matter."

Mr. Chester shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"It would be the death of me," he remarked.

There was a moment or two of silence. Lyra had taken off her hat and was spreading the cloth for lunch. The young fellow allowed his eyes to wander round the room with its dark, old-fashioned furniture and closely crammed book-case, its antique copper-plate engravings, and well-worn carpet. Then his gaze settled on Lyra. She was like a beautiful flower in a dusky garden—a spot of delicious color and light.

"Are you a stranger in these parts?" asked Mr. Chester, holding his book with his thumb between the pages, as if he were only waiting for the visitor to take himself off to resume his reading.

"Quite," was the reply. "I came down here for some fishing, but the late heavy rains have made the streams too thick, and I'm waiting for it to clear. I ought to tell you my name," he added, with an easy frankness. "It is Armitage—Dane Armitage."

Mr. Chester nodded and smiled faintly.

"Yes? Mine is Chester. This is my daughter Lyra." He smiled again. "It is a strange introduction."



"Yes," said the younger man, rather quietly. "If it had not been for Miss Chester's pluck and presence of mind, there wouldn't have been any introduction at all."

Most fathers would have looked pleased at this tribute to their daughter's courage, but Mr. Chester only nodded absently.

"Dane! It's a singular Christian name," he said, musingly.

The owner of the singular name laughed.

"Isn't it? I don't know why my godfathers and godmothers bestowed it on me; though I fancy it is an old family name. I've an aunt who firmly believes that we had something to do, in the past, with the Danes who first came over and made themselves unpleasant in Britain. It's strange how anxious most respectable and honest people are to claim kinship with a band of robbers, whether they came over with William the Conqueror or any one else. It doesn't matter so that it happened a long while ago."

Mr. Chester nodded and blinked absently.

"We are of the Chesters of Lowickshire," he began, then stopped.

"Yes? I know some of them," said Dane Armitage, casually.

"Oh, I haven't seen any of my people for years—many years," Mr. Chester made haste to remark; then, as if desirous of getting away from the subject, he went on to inquire if the fishing was good on the river.

"Yes, I believe so—I'm told so. You don't fish?"

Mr. Chester shook his head.

"No," he said. "I have never been up to the fresh water part of the river; I seldom go outside my garden, excepting to the brink of the river or up the valley. Is lunch nearly ready, Lyra?"

He was not inhospitable, but the unwonted presence of a stranger and the necessity of talking to him was irksome to the recluse. If Dane Armitage, whoever he was, would be content to sit in silence and not want to be talked to, he might, so far as Mr. Chester was concerned, sit there for a week.

The maid brought in the cold beef and the rest of the frugal fare, and Lyra took her place at the head of the table. Dane Armitage drew up his chair and made a hearty meal. His manner was perfectly free from even the shadow of shyness, and he talked freely, gradually addressing himself almost entirely to Lyra, as he saw that her father preferred silence.

Lyra listened as one listens to a new song, and looked at

him as one looks at something quite novel and hitherto undreamed of.

He talked of the strange world of which she was so ignorant, and talked of it as if he knew it—and a very great deal of it—exceedingly well. It seemed to her that he had been everywhere: fishing in Norway and Iceland—Iceland!—grizzly-bear hunting in the Rockies, pig-sticking in India, elephant-shooting in Ceylon, skating in Russia, yachting in the Mediterranean. As she listened, her chin resting in her hand, her beautiful face with its intent, thoughtful expression forming an exquisite picture, her eyes, though they were fixed on his face, saw it not; she was trying to realize the sort of life he must have led. It seemed to her like that of a fabled hero, in its contrast to her own eventless existence.

She woke from her reverie with a start when his voice ceased, and rose, still rather dreamily.

“Shall we go into the garden? It is warmer than in here, and you must still be wet.”

“Not a bit,” he said in his prompt, almost abrupt, fashion.

“But I should like to go into the garden, all the same.”

As he rose, the terrier, which had been lying at his feet, rose and barked.

“Oh, I quite forgot him!” said Lyra. “I am so sorry! Poor little doggie!”

She cut him some scraps of meat, and went down on one knee to feed him, and his owner stood and looked down at the pair.

They reminded him of a colored picture in one of the Christmas annuals.

“Will you come, father?” Lyra asked.

But Mr. Chester shook his head.

“Mr.—Mr. Armitage will excuse me,” he said. “I like to rest after my meals”—as if he ever did anything else but rest.

Lyra pulled down the blind to exclude the sunlight, and before they had left the room Mr. Chester had returned to his book.

The two, followed by the terrier, went down the path. The garden was a mass of roses and pinks and gayly colored annuals; and Dane Armitage looked round admiringly, one could have said wistfully.

“What beautiful flowers you have!” he said.

“They grow almost wild here,” said Lyra. “Griffith—that is our man—says that they flourish in the salt air and the wild wind. Look at that rose!”

She pointed to a devoniensis clambering in snowy profusion over the porch.

"Wonderful!" he said. "May I have one?"

"Oh, not that one!" she said. "It is full blown, and will fall to pieces directly. See! there is a better one."

And she reached up on tiptoe and picked a partially opened bud and gave it him.

She was as free from shyness as he; but his freedom was caused by his knowledge of the world, hers by her ignorance of it.

He took the rose and held it for a moment, then put it into the button-hole of his coat.

"Here is the warmest place," she said, indicating a rustic seat under a laurel hedge, which formed a perfect shelter from the winds. "Father and I sit here in March, when the east wind blows, and even then it is like summer."

He sat down and stretched his legs in luxurious comfort.

"Do you mind my smoking?"

She shook her head "Oh, no," and he lighted his pipe, folded his arms behind his head, and watched her with blissful content as she moved among the flowers.

"You have chosen a very picturesque spot for your home, Miss Chester," he said, breaking the silence.

Lyra looked over her shoulders at him.

"Is it not beautiful?"

"It's a pretty county, take it all round," he went on.

"I've been tramping about Barnstaple, up the Taw Vale—you know that, of course?"

Lyra shook her head.

"No; I have never been there," she said.

"No! It is quite close, too," he remarked.

"Is it?" she said. "No, I have never been there. I don't even know where it is. I have never been any further than Barnstaple, and seldom go there."

He took his pipe from his mouth and looked at her with frank surprise.

"Do you mean that you never go away from here, from home?" he asked.

She smiled faintly.

"Yes."

He looked round musingly.

"You must find it dull sometimes. I mean that it is so quiet here; there is not a house near. I didn't see one as I came along."



"No; there is no house near here excepting the farm—Greely's farm—and that is across the river."

He pondered over this for a moment or two.

"And you don't find it dull? I beg your pardon, but you don't look dull."

Lyra laughed, and remained silent for a moment, then she said:

"I never thought of it. You see, I am used to it. We came here when I was quite a little girl, and I have grown up in the place, and got accustomed to seeing no one but ourselves."

"Don't you go and visit—stay with—friends sometimes?" he asked, not in a tone of idle curiosity, but respectfully enough.

Lyra shook her head.

"No, I don't think we have any friends," she replied, contentedly. "I never heard father speak of any."

"Good Lord!" he murmured, under his breath, and his handsome eyes softened with an expression of something like pity.

"Does that seem so strange?" she asked, after a pause, as if she had understood and felt the look in his eyes.

"Well, rather," he said, frankly. "Most people go about and have friends; but," he added, "perhaps you are all the happier. At any rate, you *are* happy, I should say, Miss Chester?"

She thought a moment.

"Yes, I am happy; I think so."

Until this moment she had never asked herself this question.

"You have a great many friends, I suppose?"

As she spoke she came and sat down beside him, with the bunch of flowers she had gathered, and set to work arranging them, holding them a little away from her and regarding them critically, with her shapely head a little on one side.

"Yes, I suppose so," he said. Then he laughed the short, curt laugh. "Now you ask me point-blank, I feel rather doubtful. Has any one many friends? One, two perhaps, but not many. Anyhow I know a lot of people. My father is fond of company, and crams the house twice a year. I was going to ask you if you knew Starminster, but from what you have said I suppose you don't."

Lyra shook her head.

"Like Taw Vale, I never even heard of it," she said. "Is that where your father lives?" she added, with an innocent interest.



He nodded.

"Yes."

"And you live with him? Is it a pretty place—as pretty as this?"

"Not nearly," he said, "but pretty enough in its way. No, I don't live with him. My father and I"—he paused a moment, then laughed, and there was a touch of bitterness in the laugh—"my father and I don't get on very well. It's my fault, of course."

"Is it?" she said, still intent upon her flowers.

He changed his position into a still more comfortable one, and took two or three more pulls at his pipe before answering.

"Yes, I'm afraid it is," he said, slowly. "My father is a man who prides himself upon having always done his duty."

Lyra looked at him with a smile.

"And haven't you always done yours?" she asked.

He looked down, then laughed.

"I'm afraid not; that's the trouble. I'm afraid I'm what's called a black sheep. I don't think I'm right down bad."

Something in the tone of the apology made Lyra laugh, and he laughed in harmony.

"Self-praise is no recommendation, is it?" he went on.

"But this is how it is: my father says that I'm worse than wicked; I'm idle and restless. At the same time, I won't do what he wants me to do, and I'm always doing what I want to do myself. Don't fancy I've put that very plainly, somehow."

"Oh, it is plain enough," said Lyra. "And what is it you are always doing?"

He laughed.

"Well, I'm always wandering about. I don't seem able to stop in any one place for long together. I've got a touch of the complaint the Wandering Jew suffered from."

She looked musingly across the garden.

"Yes, I know; I've read the story. He was never able to rest, but was continually tramping on through the ages."

"That's my case," he said. "Not that I look very much like it now;" and he laughed as he leaned back and smoked.

"And what is it your father wants you to do?" she asked, displaying her interest with the frankness of one to whom the conventionalities are unknown.

"Well, for one thing, he wants me to go into Parliament."

Lyra pondered over this for a moment or two.

"Why don't you go?" she asked. "Don't you like it?"

"I certainly do not!" he said, emphatically and abruptly.

"How would you like to have to stand for a place—to have to go down to Mud-cum-sloper and curry favor with the Mud-cum-sloperites—to jaw the hind leg off a donkey at political meetings, and make a fool of yourself generally?"

Lyra laughed.

"I shouldn't like that at all," she said, promptly. "Would you have to do all that?"

"And worse," he said, in a tone of disgust. "A man has to eat no end of mud to get into Parliament nowadays. It was all very well in my father's time, when you just planked down a certain sum of money, and got in with no further trouble; but it is all different now."

"And why does he want you to become a member of Parliament, then, if—if it is so degrading?"

"You may well ask," he responded. "That's just what I have said to him. But he always talks of duty—duty to my country—as if my country, or any other country, would be any the better if I spouted in Parliament! But my father doesn't see that. He was in the House of Commons himself till he went into the House of Lords."

"Why did he go into the House of Lords?" asked Lyra. "Oh, yes! it is because he is a lord, I suppose?"

Most girls would have been startled, would have felt a throb of excitement at this discovery of his rank, but Lyra's tone was as even and placid as before.

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## CHAPTER IV.

HE nodded carelessly.

"Yes, he is the Earl of Starminster. I dare say you have heard of him, read of him in the papers." There was something very near akin to annoyance, just stopping short of contempt, in his voice. "He is always on the stump."

"On the stump?" echoed Lyra.

"Yes; spouting at public meetings, and all that sort of thing," he said, impatiently. "He's in the Cabinet."

"The Cabinet?" she murmured. "Oh, yes! I know what you mean."

"Yes; and he says it's his duty to trot up and down the country and educate—that's his word, not mine—educate the masses. As if the masses wanted educating! What they want is to be let alone. At any rate, if I were one of the masses that's what I should want, and want it badly."

Lyra laughed softly.

"It all sounds so strange to me!" she said.

"I dare say," he said, almost angrily, as if indignation were smoldering within him. "You wonder—so do I—why a man should want to, like to, 'fuss around' so. That's an American phrase, but it hits off what I mean exactly; that's the advantage of most of the American slang. I couldn't do it, and I won't, and, to come back to the beginning, that's the trouble between us. I hate the whole business, always did hate it. I'd rather be a day-laborer and live in a cottage than be Earl of Starminster and live at Starminster, with a mob of people—political nuisances—buzzing round me and worrying. Why, the house isn't fit to live in most of the time!" He refilled his pipe, and lighted it impatiently, angrily. "But I beg your pardon. I've been cackling about myself and my belongings too much. You must be bored to death."

"No," said Lyra slowly, thoughtfully. "It is all new and strange to me, and interesting, Mr. Armitage." She paused, and looked at him with a frank smile upon her lovely face. "But I suppose you are not 'Mr.' Armitage. What is it I ought to call you?"

He laughed curtly.

"Oh, that's good enough," he said. "Anyhow, it is as good as Lord Armitage, as I am usually called."

She laughed softly, freely, unaffectedly.

"I ought to have said, 'My lord,' " she said.

He sat bolt upright with annoyance, then leaned back.

"Good heavens—no!" he said. "It sounds as if you were a deputation or something of that kind. Please call me Armitage—or Dane, if you like."

His eyes dropped as he made the last suggestion, but her own rested on him with simple candor.

"I don't know anything about it," she said. "I never spoke to a lord before in all my life, and probably shall not do so again."

"Oh, I hope so!" he said, almost fervently. "I hope you won't cut me altogether, Miss Chester."

"Cut you?" she murmured, perplexed by the slang.

"I mean avoid me—not know me," he explained.

Lyra laughed softly.

"Oh, I see! I dare say we shall never meet again, Lord Armitage," she said, placidly. "But if we should, I shall not 'cut' you. Why should I?"

"Why, indeed?" he said. "I hope you won't."

The maid came out of the house.

"Will you have tea out here, miss?" she said in her broad Devonshire. "Master's asleep."



"Shall we have it here?" asked Lyra. "Yes; but presently, Mary."

He knocked out his pipe.

"I am staying an unconscionable time," he said, slowly, as he dreaded his dismissal.

"Are you?" said Lyra. "It does not matter—at least, to me. But you shall go now if you like—if you do not care for tea."

"Oh, yes, I do!" he said.

He loathed it. They rose, as if by mutual accord, and went down the path to the river-bank.

"That's a beautiful valley up there," he said, looking toward it.

"Oh, you don't know how beautiful!" exclaimed Lyra. "It is a little paradise. There are ferns there which grow in no other part of Devonshire. You can get the English maiden-hair, and you know how rare that is."

"I'm afraid I don't," he said. "What's it like?"

"Come, and I'll show you," she said, brightly.

They walked side by side up the valley. The sun shone through the veil of leaves; the birds sung their midsummer song of love and gladness; the whole air was perfumed by the wild flowers. A strange sense of peace and rest fell upon this restless young man—a strange sense of happiness sprung up in the heart of the girl. They seemed to breathe an enchanted air; the flowers took to themselves a new and more glorious coloring; the sky appeared of a brighter, happier blue; the song of the birds was full of a new and sweeter music. Now and again as they walked on and talked together he glanced at the girl by his side, and her fresh, unstained loveliness wrought upon him like a spell.

In all his life—and how full of experience his life had been—he had never met any one like her. Never. So frank, so free, and so beautiful. Living here in this lovely solitude—the loveliest thing in it—without friends, outside the world, her purity and innocence as yet unsullied, how strangely different her life was to that of the other girls he knew; and yet she was so self-possessed, so full of quiet, maidenly dignity, there was no vulgar shyness, timidity, with half-frightened glances and awkward movements, such as make the uncultivated and underbred so "difficult" and "impossible." She was a lady from the crown of her beautiful head to the soles of her feet.

Now, Dane Viscount Armitage was neither a particularly good nor charitable young man, but as he sauntered up the



moss-paved valley beside Lyra Chester, he was conscious of a very strong desire to change this life of hers, to show her something of the world, of its brightness, gayety, and pleasure. It seemed a sin and a crime, a waste of good material, as Ruskin says, that one so eminently fitted to shine in the world, in society, should be doomed to waste all her rare gifts of beauty, of voice, of face, on the solitude and silence that brooded over Taw stream.

Lyra Chester's life was no concern of his—indeed, there was one good reason, which will appear presently, why it should be a matter of perfect indifference to him—but Dane Armitage, walking up this enchanted valley beside the lovely girl, who seemed as if she were its natural queen, did not think of this reason.

And Lyra? She did not think at all. At her age and in her state of innocence and ignorance of the world, one takes one's happiness as the young birds in the nest take their food; without asking questions as to whence it comes or why. If she had wondered why she felt so happy that afternoon, she would have decided that it was because she had a companion, some one with whom she could talk, to whom she could listen; she who had never had a companion of her own age, and talked and listened so seldom.

While the terrier—Lyra had already learned to call him by his name, Rags, and he came to her call as promptly as he did to his master's—while Rags hunted rabbits, the two humans hunted English maiden-hair. Lyra found a root at last, and pointed out its beauties to Dane.

"It's not a very fine one," she said. "The best and biggest always grow up in the crannies of the rocks. Why, there is one!" and she pointed to a root above her head, and catching at a branch, swung herself up lightly, put her foot in a crevice, and reached for the fern.

Dane reached in amazement and some apprehension, which was almost overborne by admiration, so full of ease and grace was her action.

"Pray take care!" he said. "If that branch were to give, or your foot slip, you would fall and break something."

She looked down at him with an assured smile.

"I am all right," she said. "I am used to clambering about. This is nothing to the rocky hills further up the valley."

"Give me the fern. Let me hold your hand," he said.

Obediently she tried to do both, and, as might have been ex-

pected, lost her balance; her foot slipped, and she would have fallen if he had not caught her.

For a moment he held her in his arms—for a moment only; but in that short space of time he was thrillingly conscious of her breath upon his cheek, the beating of her heart against his side.

She was out of his arms in an instant, and though he felt a queer pulsation in his veins that sent the blood to his face, she stood quite calm, unruffled, and unconscious.

“Is it all right?” she asked.

He looked at her as if he were rather dazed, as he was indeed.

“The fern, I mean? I tried to get as much of the root as I could.”

“Oh—yes, yes; it is all right,” he said, examining the specimen with more attention than it required.

“If you keep it in water till you plant it, it will live,” she said.

He plucked a large fern-leaf and wrapped the maiden-hair in it carefully.

“I’ll take every care of it,” he said, in rather a low voice; his heart was still beating unsteadily. “And I’ll plant it myself when I get to Starminster.”

“You must put it in a damp place, under the shadow of some trees. They die in too much sunlight.”

He stowed the fern away in the under breast-pocket of his coat, and they walked on. Presently they came out of the little wood. The valley had broadened and the stream was here clear of bushes and undergrowth. Dane uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

“There ought to be fish here,” he said.

“Fish!” laughed Lyra. “It is full of fish—trout.”

“No. But of course it must be; every stream in Devonshire is. I wish I had a rod! We could fill a basket here. Don’t you fish?”

She opened her eyes upon him.

“No. Do ladies fish?”

“Why, yes,” he replied, “no end of them. It is a lady’s sport. If I had a rod I could teach you in half an hour or so.” Like all anglers, he was enthusiastic. “Ladies, as a rule, throw a better fly than men; their hands are lighter and their sight quicker. I taught a cousin of mine”—he hesitated, and stopped as if he had said more than he intended; but as Lyra looked expectantly at him he went on, but in a casual

way—"and she got on very well, but she dropped it like a hot coal after the first time."

"She got tired of it?"

"No, oh, no! she was awfully fetched by it, but it suddenly struck her that it was cruel and wicked, and she spent the rest of the morning jawing—I beg your pardon—lecturing me upon its sinfulness."

Lyra gazed at him thoughtfully.

"You see, she's one of the very good sort," he explained, but in an uninterested way, as if he did not care for the subject. "Thinks it wicked to enjoy one's self in any way; one of that kind of persons who are always asking themselves if they're not committing a mortal sin in daring to eat their breakfast or take a walk."

"I never heard of any one like that," said Lyra, meditatively.

"You're precious lucky, then," he said, rather ruefully. "They're uncomfortable sort of people, and to be carefully avoided, not that Theodosia is a bad sort in other ways," he added, almost to himself.

"Theodosia! Isn't that a strange name?" she said.

He laughed.

"Yes; we rather go in for peculiar names in our family," he said. "But it fits her like a glove. How far does this stream run clear of bushes like this?" he asked, changing the subject abruptly.

"Oh, it winds in and out among the rocks for a couple of miles," she said. "But I am afraid"—and she sighed faintly—"that we must go back. Tea will be ready, and my father may want me."

They strolled back rather silently, Lyra stopping to gather flowers now and again, Dane Armitage smoking in a thoughtful way.

When they reached the cottage, they found the tea ready on the rustic table and Mr. Chester seated, waiting. He looked up vacantly at Dane Armitage, as if he had not seen him before, then remembered, and nodded.

Lyra poured out the tea, and Dane Armitage drank to the bitter dregs the cup which he loathed; then, with a strange reluctance, prepared to take his departure.

"I have to thank you and Miss Chester for a very pleasant afternoon, sir," he said.

Mr. Chester blinked at him, and murmured the conventional response:

"Very pleased to see you—any time!"



But absent-minded as was the tone in which the invitation was given, Dane Armitage seemed to welcome it.

"Thank you very much," he said, quite gratefully. Then as he held Lyra's small, soft hand, he said in a low voice: "Do you think you would consider fly-fishing very wicked?"

She had risen and was walking by his side to the gate, and she looked up at him with the frank smile in her eyes.

"No, I don't think so."

"Well, you can't very well tell till you try, can you?" he said. "If you'll let me, I'll bring a rod to-morrow—yes, to-morrow morning—and give you a lesson."

The smile grew brighter, and her evident, quite uncoined pleasure in the proposal smote him.

"Will you? That will be very kind of you! Yes, I should like it. But won't it be giving you too much trouble? I shall be very awkward and clumsy."

"No, it won't be any trouble, and I'm sure you will pick it up easily enough," he said, trying to speak casually and almost indifferently to hide his intense satisfaction—shall it be written, delight? "Good-bye, then—till to-morrow."

Lyra stood at the gate, looking after him; then she went slowly back to the table.

Had the sun gone behind a cloud? Had a sudden wind arisen to chill the morning? Somehow, as he was lost to sight, something of the brightness and the glad warmth of the day seemed to have vanished with him.

She sat down with her hands in her lap, a dreamy, questioning look in her eyes; and her father's voice made her start.

"Did you get that paper, Lyra?" he asked.

"The paper? Oh, yes! But what did I do with it? I must have left it in the boat. One moment, father."

She ran down to the boat and found it lying under the seat—it was rather wet—and ran up with it.

"There it is," she said, breathlessly. "It got wet when I pulled him—I mean Lord Armitage—out of the water."

He took the paper and opened it.

"I've left my spectacles in the parlor," he said. She rose with the promptitude of one accustomed to instant obedience, and went into the house, but could not find the spectacles. When she came out again her father had them on and was reading the paper. It was clutched tightly in his hands and hid his face, but when she said:

"Why, you have them after all," he lowered the paper with a spasmodic kind of motion, and she saw that his thin face was deathly white. "Oh, father! what is it—what is the



matter? Are you ill?" she asked, going to him and putting her arm round him.

He put up his hand. She felt it tremble, and put her arm from him.

"No, no," he said huskily, shakily. "It is nothing. I—I think the air has got colder; I'll go in."

"Let me help you, father," she said anxiously, lovingly; but he put out his hand as if to ward her off.

"No, no," he said, generously, "I am quite able to walk by myself. I tell you it is nothing—I am all right;" and he went into the house.

Meanwhile, Armitage tramped back to Barnstaple. He walked fast; he smoked furiously; there was a troubled frown upon his brow; all of which are, in men, signs of the working of a guilty conscience. Rags knew this well enough, and trotted demurely, gravely at his master's heels, instead of scampering after rabbits and barking furiously, as was his wont.

"Confound it!" murmured Dane. "It won't do—no, it won't do. I'll go off by the night train—if there is a night train." He filled his pipe again. "How beautiful she is, and how—how—" If he had been a poet or a woman he would have said "sweet;" but he couldn't find a word to please him. "I wish to Heaven I'd taken myself off when I got out of the boat; and I've promised to go again to-morrow. How pleased she looked when I told her I was coming. Poor girl! Leading such a life, it must have seemed something to look forward to. I can see her face now. Yes, I'll go off at once. Another day by her side and—and I shouldn't be able to go at all."

He sighed, and strode on till he came to the station.

"Any train leave here for London to-night?" he asked.

"No, sir. Last London train just gone."

Dane Armitage swore; but a look of relief, of guilty relief, came into his face. He walked into the town and stopped in front of the hotel; but instead of going in, he went along up the High Street and entered a fishing-tackle shop.

"Got any trout rods?" he asked.

The man remarked that he had the best—the very best—assortment in all the country.

"I want a light one—a very light one—for a lady," Dane said.

The man showed him one—an expensive, nickel-mounted affair with all the latest improvements.

"Is that the best you've got?" demanded Dane, in a dis-

satisfied voice. He would not have considered one mounted with gold too good.

The man stared.

"It's the very best split cane, sir—"

"Oh, all right," said Dane, cutting him short. He paid for the things, and marched down the street with it and into the hotel.

As he entered his private sitting-room, with the same restless and uneasy expression in his eyes, it made them rather fierce. A gentleman half rose from the usual hotel sofa, and in soft and lisping accents greeted him with:

"How do you do, Dane?"

He was a young man, very fair—insipidly fair—with almost colorless hair and steely blue eyes. His hair was thin and beautifully parted. He was clean shaven, and he looked the picture of fashionable and fastidious neatness. Was it Sydney Smith who said that he did not like a man because he was so disgustingly neat? If so, Sydney Smith would not have liked this young man. There was something—well, exasperatingly effeminate in the clean-shaven face, the dress, the long white hands, the voice, and something equally exasperating in the languid air of self-satisfaction and self-conceit which clothed him as if in a garment.

Dane Armitage stared at this specimen of our ultra-civilization in silence for a moment, then, by way of greeting, remarked, none too politely:

"What the devil brings you here, Chandos?"

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## CHAPTER V.

"WHAT the devil brings you here, Chandos?" said Dane Armitage, not very politely, considering that Chandos Armitage was his cousin.

The Honorable Mr. Chandos smiled sweetly—he was famous for his smile, among other things which shall be mentioned presently.

"My dear Dane, what a greeting! Any one who did not know you as well as I do, would imagine that you were not glad to see me."

"Oh, that's all right!" said Dane the brusque. "But, after all, what *has* brought you here?"

Chandos Armitage shrugged his shoulders remonstratingly.

"This is a free country, my dear Dane, and we are all free men. I am here in the course of my wanderings."

"Wanderings!" growled Dane, rather impatiently, under his breath.

"Yes; wanderings in search of the Beautiful and the True." The Honorable Chandos Armitage was a poet; that is to say, he wrote feeble verses which were feeble imitations of real poets: Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne. These were very much admired by his female acquaintances and himself—especially by himself.

He not only wrote verses, but he set them to music—also a feeble copy of well-known composers, or more often long-forgotten musicians, for Chandos Armitage was not without guile. And he sung these "Songs of Exile"—though why he called himself an exile no one knew—with his head thrown well back, and his eyes fixed with an emotional expression on the ceiling; and the ladies—some of them—declared his songs and him to be too, just too sweet and lovely.

He also painted a little—feeble little sketches without life or backbone; dabs of color—generally indigo—which he called impressions, and were intended to mean Heaven knows what. He also played the guitar in a tinkling fashion, and carved Swiss girls and chamois in wood. In fact, he was a very accomplished gentleman, and considered to be an ornament to his family in particular, and a sweet boon to mankind in general. It is true that not one of his accomplishments would have earned him a crust of bread if he had been starving; but this did not matter, for, fortunately for him, he possessed a small but sufficient income; just enough to allow him to gratify his numerous tastes, to live in luxurious chambers, ride in hansoms, belong to two or three first-class clubs, dress like—well, like Mr. Chandos Armitage—and travel about "in search of the Beautiful and the True."

But for Dane Armitage he would have been a very great and a very rich man, for Dane, and Dane only, stood between Mr. Chandos and the earldom of Starminster. If Dane should chance to die, or fail to marry, Chandos would be the earl.

But though Chandos would not have been sorry if his cousin should be removed to the land of Rest, he, Chandos, was not likely to stab him in the back or poison him? for Chandos Armitage was not that kind of villain.

Indeed, he was scarcely a villain at all, in the ordinary acceptance of the term.

He was vain as a peacock, weak as water, and selfish as—as a man, and only a man, can be. All his little verses were about love, and breathed tenderness and sentiment, full of "hearts" and "darts," "loves" and "doves," parting and



despair, constancy and the domestic affections; but, to put the matter bluntly, Mr. Chandos Armitage, though he wailed so tenderly, was as heartless as a doll—he was all hay and sawdust inside.

He would have sacrificed his nearest relation or his dearest friend if by such sacrifice he could have gratified the smallest desire, the most transient caprice.

Dane had a very strong inkling of this disposition of this cousin of his, had a lively contempt for his “poems” and protestations of sentiment, and, I am afraid, despised him and all his works.

Dane liked a man who could ride, hunt, fish, swim—a *man*, in short—and, in his opinion, the elegant, dainty, warbling Chandos was only a feeble imitation of a man. He irritated Dane, made him lose his temper and swear, and all the more readily and furiously because Mr. Chandos Armitage never lost his temper and rarely, if ever, swore.

“You know I am at work at my new volume of poems,” went on Chandos, lying back, with his head gracefully resting on his arm, his white hand hanging down—“lolloping,” Dane would have said. “They’re of a rustic, rural character this time, and I am studying from the life. I like to get all my ‘properties’ correctly; to see my farmers and dairy-maids in the flesh, to inhale the perfume of the hay and the orchards, hear the birds sing, and—and—”

“The pigs grunt,” put in Dane, with the intention of nipping Chandos’s sentimentalizing in the bud.

“Er—yes, quite so,” smiled Chandos, with a little sniff of disgust. “Quite so, though that is scarcely poetical, my dear Dane.”

“Well, pigs do grunt, they don’t sing,” said Dane, putting the fishing-rod in the corner and “tidying” the room generally.

“All the voices of Nature are harmonious to the real poet,” remarked Chandos, sweetly.

“I dare say. But what made you come here to Barnstaple?”

Chandos shrugged his shoulders.

“Mere whim, chance, caprice,” he said, languidly. “I have heard of its beauties, its downy hills and ferny vales, its silver streams—”

“And clotted creams,” broks in Dane, with laughing impatience. “Why the deuce do you always talk in such a high-falutin style, Chandos? You’re not at a tea-party, surrounded by a lot of women who believe in you, and think every word you utter an—an oracle. You came here because you did,

eh? All right; now then, to business. You'll stop to dinner? You're stopping here at this hotel, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Chandos. "For to-night—"

"For one night only," as they say in the bills," said Dane, who somehow or other never could resist the desire to chaff his exquisite relative.

"Yes; I want to see the sun set from the bridge, and the river at the bottom of the town. I think I can write a poem on that scene. I have got the first lines."

He raised himself slightly, fixed his washed-out blue eyes on the opposite wall, and murmured:

"I stood by the stream at midnight,  
When all was dark and weird—"

"For I'd drunk too much in the morning, and my eyes were red and bleared," struck in Dane. "I've heard something like that before. Why, man, it's Longfellow's 'Bridge' slightly altered; that is to say, murdered."

A faint, resentful red came into Chandos's face, and his eyes grew sullen and angry.

"I fear you have no soul for poetry, my poor Dane," he said.

"'Fraid I haven't," assented Dane, with Philistine cheerfulness. "You see, you've got it all, Chandos; you've mopped up all there was in the family, and just now I'm too hungry for anything less substantial than food."

He rang the bell. Immediately a well-dressed, respectable-looking waiter appeared.

"Hurry up the dinner, waiter; and look here, this gentleman, Mr. Armitage, will dine with me."

"Yes, sir," said the waiter.

Chandos raised himself again with a feeble interest.

"What have you ordered, Dane? They will be sure to give you soles; people in these sort of places always do," he remarked, plaintively. "Waiter, please see that they are boiled, not fried, unless Lord Armitage has specially ordered them so."

"Oh! have 'em as you like," said Dane, indifferently.

The waiter stared, looked surprised, and became humbly respectful in a moment. Dane had not acquainted them with his rank.

"Yes, sir—yes, my lord," he said. "Certainly—boiled."

"And," murmured Chandos, "if you give us a fowl—which you are sure to do—please, *please* do not forget the bread-sauce."

"No, sir. Certainly not, sir."

"For a poet, you are mighty particular, Chandos," he remarked. "I had an idea you high-souled gentry didn't care what you eat or drank."

Chandos sighed plaintively.

"I am not strong, and I am obliged to be particularly careful. I have not, like you, the digestion of an ox, Dane. And, by the way, you mentioned drink. Do you think they have some decent—some *really* decent Hock? If not, perhaps we'd better have champagne."

"I should say they don't know what Hock is, or wouldn't even know how to spell it," responded Dane. "I'll order some champagne."

"A-h! I think I'll go and dress," said the poet; and he rose slowly, as if to soft music.

"Dress?" said Dane, eying him with a smile. "Why, you look as if you had come out of a handbox already. Don't trouble to put on dress-clothes for me."

"No? You mean it really? Very well; but I never feel as if I could enjoy my dinner in morning attire."

"Oh! you'll enjoy your dinner well enough, unless you've changed pretty considerably since I saw you last," said Dane, laughing his curt laugh. "Look sharp; you've only got a quarter of an hour."

The Honorable Chandos got up slowly, and gracefully left the room.

Dane went up to wash his hands, with the feeling of impatient irritation which Mr. Chandos never failed to arouse strong upon him.

Dane was as hospitable as an Arab; would have shared his last crust with a beggar—better than that, have given them his last cigar—but he was *not* glad to see his cousin this evening.

He wanted to be alone, to think over what had happened on the river Taw that day; to think—yes, the truth must be told—of Lyra Chester.

He paused several times in the process of washing himself, with the towel in his hand, to recall some expression of her face, some inflection of her musical voice. He thought of her living there at the ruined mill, growing up in that solitude, with no girl, no woman friend, and his heart ached with a yearning kind of pity which only intensified his interest in her.

"I shall see her to-morrow," he thought, as he brushed his hair; and the thought was inexpressibly pleasant and soothing;



scarcely soothing, though, for conscience—with a capital C—cut in and worried him with that still voice which we all spend our lives in trying to stifle.

When he went down he found his cousin awaiting him. Chandos had changed his morning attire for a suit of dark clothes which was a kind of compromise with evening-dress. He looked beautiful, and he smelled of lavender water.

The waiter served the dinner. It was a good plain meal, well cooked, and, strange to relate, hot, not lukewarm.

Dane was hungry, and eat as if he enjoyed it. Chandos was hungry also, but eat as if he were discharging a duty to mankind. He sent down for fresh sauce, and sighed plaintively because the cutlets were served without paper frills.

"The champagne's all right," said Dane, taking a draught with the air of a man not ashamed to be thirsty.

"Yes," said Chandos. "It is not '80, but we must not be too exigent in these barbaric regions." He had drunk by far the best part of the bottle, by the way. "As I was saying at Castle Towers the other day, an Englishman only understands one liquid, and that is—beer. Unfortunately, I can not drink beer."

"Thank goodness I can—lots of it!" said Dane. "And so you've been to Castle Towers, Chandos? Try these cigars."

"Thanks! Your cigars are too strong for me; I tried one of them once." He shuddered. "Yes, I was at Castle Towers last week."

"Yes? And how are they all? How is Theodosia?"

As he put the question, Dane winced inwardly. Conscience pricked him.

Chandos got up, and murmuring, "Do you mind?" extended himself on the sofa.

"Not a bit. Sit, lie where you like. Theodosia seemed in the best of health, and as sweet as usual."

"Oh! was she sweet?" said Dane, rather absently.

"Yes," murmured Chandos, with half-closed lips, but watching his cousin, the viscount, nevertheless. "Yes; she is a rare plant, is dear Theodosia."

Dane put his foot upon a chair and leaned back and laughed.

"That sounds as if she were a kind of trick, deception," he said. "You've the oddest way of expressing yourself, Chandos."

"Yes? What I meant was that dear Theodosia is the very epitome of those chaste and devout virtues which—which are woman's rarest and sweetest charms. You are an extremely

fortunate man, Dane, to be betrothed to such an altogether adorable woman."

"Thanks. Yes, I suppose I am. And what was she doing? Usual kind of thing, I suppose;" and he suppressed a sigh that was remarkably like an impatient one.

"Theodosia is engaged in her usual good works," replied Chandos. "I found her surrounded by clergymen of various denominations. She was just starting a society for the assistance of fallen women. I was very glad—humbly glad—to be able to contribute my mite."

"Oh!" said Dane, rather queerly.

He was silent a moment; then he said, looking hard at his cigar:

"By the way, Chandos, I had rather a strange experience the other evening."

"Y-es?" drawled Mr. Chandos, sipping his champagne, with half-closed eyes.

"Yes. My man came into my room and said a woman wanted to see me."

Mr. Chandos shook his head sadly, and blew out a cloud of cigarette smoke with luxuriously easeful reproach.

"My dear Dane, I trust you did not see her. No woman with proper self-respect would visit a man in his chambers."

"Well, I did see her," said Dane, slowly, and with still averted eyes. "I didn't know who she was or what she wanted, and—well, I suppose I was curious. Walford showed in a girl—a young girl."

"My dear Dane," murmured the poet, with gentle reproach—Dane glanced at him with the same kind of queerness—"one should never lay one's self open to temptation, or give even the excuse for scandal. A young girl visit your chambers! What would be thought if it were known? And I suppose your man Walford, like the rest of them, is not to be trusted. My dear Dane, you should have more consideration for your reputation."

"Thanks," said Dane, in a dry voice. "As for Walford, I have had him for many years—ever since I left college—and he would as soon think of talking of my visitors, male or female, as—you would."

"I am delighted to hear it!" rejoined Chandos, in a tone that implied that his distrust of Walford was as strong as ever. "But the girl, Dane? What did she want?" he inquired, with a curiosity remarkable in so virtuous and superior a young man.

"Well," said Dane, slowly, "she seemed surprised and

taken aback when she got into the room and saw me, and when I rose and offered a chair, she blushed for a moment, then went white, and faltered out that there must be some mistake."

Mr. Chandos smiled in a superior way.

"The usual excuse! My dear Dane, she was acting; it was all *théâtre*, as the French say. And what was her business?"

"That's what I asked her," said Dane. "She was very overwhelmed and confused, and for a time I couldn't make out what was amiss. But it seemed that she had been cruelly used. The old story, Chandos—a trusting woman and a black-guard who had taken advantage of her innocence to betray her."

"Dear, dear; this is dreadful!" murmured Chandos. "I suppose her story was true. It was not a cleverly got-up tale to draw some money from you?"

"I believe her story was true," said Dane. "I'm not a clever man like you, Chandos, but I'm not too easily imposed upon. Her story was true—yes!"

"But why on earth did she come to you?" said Chandos, curiously.

"Well, it happened this way," said Dane, staring hard at his cigar: "Her betrayer had managed to keep her in ignorance of his real name, and had left her, as he thought, without any clew to his identity."

"The scoundrel!" murmured Chandos, with mild indignation. "Ah, my dear Dane, when will our legislature pass a law punishing such cold-hearted villainy? I trust, when you get into the Upper House, that you will turn your attention to this question."

"Y-es," said Dane. "But it seems that this gentleman had been, as usual, not quite clever enough. He had left a handkerchief in her possession—a handkerchief marked with his name."

Mr. Chandos nodded with profound satisfaction.

"But still I don't see, Dane, why she should come to you."

"Well, you see," said Dane, slowly, "the name was the same as mine—Armitage."

Mr. Chandos raised himself, and opened his mouth like a cod, then he sunk back very red in the face and quite dumb.

"The same name," repeated Dane. "Some friend had looked up the name for her in the directory, found mine and my address, and the poor girl had come to my chambers, expecting to find her betrayer."

Mr. Chandos blew his nose with his delicately scented hand-



kerchief, and kept it up before his red face for a lengthened period.

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## CHAPTER VI.

"I WAS naturally curious to know who he was—this man with the same name as my own—and I asked her to describe him." He paused, and took a draught of his champagne. "You will be surprised to hear that she gave an exact description of yourself, Chandos."

Mr. Chandos sat up, then sunk down again.

"My dear Dane, I—you—er—"

"Hold on," said Dane, coldly. "I don't want you to explain your conduct, or to make it worse by lying. Your private life is no concern of mine; the whole business would not concern me in any way, if the girl had not come to me. But as she had come I could not turn a deaf ear and a cold heart to her story. She says you left her to starve."

"My dear Dane, you—you shock me. There—there must be some misunderstanding," said Chandos, rather huskily, and still very red in the face. "There is—er—always—er—a great deal of exaggeration in these cases, and—er—I'm afraid—"

"Perhaps," said Dane, sternly; "but I don't think there was in this one. Anyway, I gave her some money for you, and I promised to give her some every month—still on your account. I did this for the honor of the family. You can pay me back, if you like, and if you don't, you can leave it alone."

"My dear Dane—"

"Hold on a moment. I don't want to hear any more about it. I've got my own opinion of your conduct, and I dare say you know what that is without my telling you. But"—with a sudden burst of indignation, with a sudden eruption of the temper for which he was famous—"for Heaven's sake! don't vapor about sentiment and virtue to me any more, or I shall feel jolly well tempted to chuck you out of the window."

Mr. Chandos turned pale—for Dane had half risen from his chair—and eyed his cousin with mingled fear and hate; and it may be said that at that moment, though he would not have had the courage to stick Lord Dane under the fifth rib, he would have looked on, while some one else did it, with cheerful satisfaction.

"I—I think you make too much of the—the matter, my dear Dane," he said, rather stammeringly. "*An affaire de*

*cœur*—an—an ordinary flirtation with—with a girl whom a man in my position could not dream of—of—marrying—”

“No, you were too good to marry her, but not too high and mighty to ‘ruin her,’” said Dane, fiercely. “There! for Heaven’s sake, hold your tongue! I always thought you were a mean lot, Chandos, with all your poetical rant; and now I know it. That will do. Better keep your mouth shut; you can’t better the business by lying about it. I’m sorry to have to talk to you like this while I am, so to speak, your host—but—”

“My dear Dane, you—you act according to your lights,” murmured Mr. Chandos. “I—er—never set up to be a paragon of all the virtues. And I—er—dare say—you yourself are not immaculate.”

“No,” responded Dane, with a mixture of passionate indignation and self-reproach. “I’m a bad lot enough, I know; but I’m d——d if I’m as bad as that. There, that will do. Have some more wine—another cigar?”

Mr. Chandos rose with a very good attempt at dignity, but was still rather pale, and kept the table between him and the stalwart, strong-limbed Dane.

“No, thanks; I have had enough, thank you; and if you will permit me to say so, I think you have too. Nothing but—but the excellence of the champagne would excuse your—er—language. But I forgive you, my dear Dane,” he made haste to add, as Dane took his legs off the chair and regarded his virtuous cousin with flashing eyes—“I forgive you. I can bear a great deal at your hands, and—and—I trust that the story—which is not—er—altogether correct, will not be repeated.”

Dane laughed savagely.

“Yes; it’s likely I should repeat it,” he growled.

“Quite so. These—these—small matters of private sentiment are—er—better kept private.”

“Oh, go to—bed!” exclaimed Dane.

“Yes, I think I will. Good-night, Dane. I—er—shall continue my rambles to-morrow. I may start early, quiet early, before your breakfast hour. If so, I will say ‘good-bye.’”

He held out his hand, but as Dane, with unusual short-sightedness, did not appear to see it, Mr. Chandos pretended he was reaching for a match, took it, lighted a cigarette, and with another softly, sweetly murmured “Good-night!” eloquent of long suffering and forgiveness, got himself out of the room.

But when the door closed, dividing him from his indignant

and hot-tempered cousin, Mr. Chandos's expression changed, and his refined and poetic countenance contrived to display an extraordinary malignity.

"Curse you!" he muttered. "You ride the high horse over me, do you? You think because you are the heir to the earldom and I am only Chandos Armitage that you can say and do what you like. Take care, you bully, take care! My time may come some day. Er—er—it is a fine night, waiter," he broke off aloud as a waiter came along the passage and, not unnaturally, stared at the gentleman who was gesticulating and muttering in such an extraordinary fashion.

"Beautiful night, sir; the moon is a-shinin' like—like anything!"

"Ah! I think I will take a turn before going to bed."

He went down-stairs and got his hat, and paused at the bar.

"I think I will take a glass—a small glass—well, perhaps I'd have one of your ordinary—er—large glasses—of brandy and water hot," he said, in dulcet tones to the barmaid. "I do not usually take it, but it is as well to be careful." He drank this with surprising ease, considering its unfamiliarity, and walked out.

The people of Barnstaple go to bed early, and it is therefore to be presumed that they are wealthy, healthy and wise; and the streets seemed to be deserted.

Mr. Chandos strolled along smoking his cigarette and chewing the cud of Dane's vigorous language, without meeting any one for some time, but presently he almost ran against a man coming out of a small public-house at one of the corners.

The man apologized, and was passing on, when Mr. Chandos stopped with an exclamation of surprise and—looked hard at him.

"Why, Rawdon, is that you?" he said.

The man stopped as if he had been shot, and stared at his interlocutor in rather a confused and vinous manner. He was a respectably dressed man, having something of the appearance of a clerk or school-master, and his face was rather a weak than a bad one. It was, however, heavily lined, and, but for the flush which drink bestows, pale and careworn.

He regarded Mr. Chandos shyly, reservedly, for a moment, then smiled feebly.

"It's Chandos Armitage, isn't it?"

He had been at the same college with Chandos, but after leaving Cambridge they had gone their respective ways; and Rawdon's had been a downward one.

"Yes, it is I," said Chandos, blandly. "It is very strange



meeting you here in this out-of-the-way place. What are you doing here, Rawdon—got a living, curacy?"

Rawdon shook his head and lowered it for a moment.

"N-o," he said. "I didn't take orders, after all. I'm not in the Church."

"No? Then what are you doing? Dear me! it is years since we met," said Chandos, glancing at the other's black and shabby garments, and at once adopting a superior and rather patronizing tone.

"Yes," said Mr. Rawdon, looking up and down the street, and then shyly at the well-clad and flourishing Mr. Chandos. "All sorts of things have happened since then. You're pretty flourishing, Armitage, I can see."

Mr. Chandos smiled with that complacency which arouses in one a burning desire to kick the man who displays it.

"Yes? Well, you've been luckier than I have," said Rawdon, with a suppressed sigh. "I've had a rough time of it. I meant going in for the Church, as you know, but—but—well, I came a mucker somehow."

Mr. Chandos shook his sleek head reproachfully.

"Ah, my dear Rawdon, the old, old story! Those dreadful cards and—er—the wine cup; you were rather too fond of them in the old college days!"

"Yes," assented Rawdon, with a sigh. "Yes, I suppose that will account for it; at any rate, I got on the down track; it doesn't matter how, does it?"

He looked up and down the street, and his hand went to his lips in a stray, restive kind of way. Who does not know it?

"You don't care for a drink, I suppose, Armitage?"

"I rarely drink," said the virtuous poet. "Besides, I'm afraid we could not get anything fit to drink."

"You can get a decent drop of brandy in this place," said Mr. Rawdon, with the air of one who knows by experience; and he led the way into the small public-house.

Mr. Chandos was served with some more hot brandy, which he drank leisurely, while Mr. Rawdon drank his glass of spirits with a feverish kind of impatience.

"And so you have fallen on evil days?" remarked Chandos, blandly.

Rawdon nodded.

"Yes. I used to think myself a clever sort of fellow, but you see what I've come to." He glanced down at his seedy clothes. Mr. Chandos offered him a cigarette, but Rawdon shook his head and lighted a strong-looking pipe. "Everything went wrong with me. I could have passed for the

Church, or the Army, or the Bar, or anything, if it hadn't been for—"

He lifted his glass significantly.

"Dear, dear! Ah, my dear Rawdon, what a curse this drink is!" murmured Mr. Chandos, as he sipped his steaming toddy with a pious sigh.

"Yes," assented Rawdon, dryly; "but it's the kind of curse that men like myself would rather have than a blessing."

"And what are you doing now?" inquired Mr. Chandos.

Rawdon shrugged his shoulders apologetically.

"At present I'm teaching elocution and history at a ladies' school here," he said. "It isn't much of a berth, but it keeps the wolf from the door and finds me in clothes, such as they are, and—and tobacco. I suppose you don't know of anything better? You'd help an old friend, I suppose, Armitage?"

"Can you doubt it?" murmured Mr. Chandos, who wouldn't have helped him on any consideration. "No, my dear Rawdon. If there is any sentiment which lingers longer and clings closer to the human heart, it is—I say"—the brandy and water on the top of the champagne was rather muddling—"if there is any sentiment which I foster with the greatest care, it is the friendship of early youth. Be sure, if I hear of anything that would—er—suit you, that I will communicate with you at once. Hear me! it's a thousand pities you didn't go into the Church. Why, you look more like a parson than anything else now!"

Rawdon laughed bitterly.

"Do I? That is because I dress in black clothes. It's more respectable, and the school-mistress where I teach likes it. Well, will you have another? No? Then I will. You'd better. Fill up this gentleman's glass, Jennie."

Mr. Chandos did not protest very firmly, and while he sipped his third glass, he regarded his companion and old college chum with a thoughtful smile, though with rather a doubtful and double vision.

"And you, I suppose," said Rawdon, "are as flourishing as ever. Let me see, weren't you next heir to some swell earl—the earl of—of—I forget—"

"The Earl of Starminster," said Mr. Chandos. "My cousin—('curse him!')"—he put in, mentally—"Dane Armitage is the heir, you remember."

"Yes, I remember," said Rawdon. "A fine fellow. Was stroke in the 'varsity boat. Yes, I remember; and there is

only his life between you and this title, eh? By Jove! if any thing should happen to him, or he shouldn't marry—"

Mr. Chandos set his teeth hard.

"Nothing is likely to happen to him," he said, bitterly; "and he's sure to marry; he's engaged, as it is."

Rawdon laughed rather unfeelingly. Mr. Chandos considered.

"That's rather hard lines on you, Armitage. Well, if you do come into the title by any fluke, don't forget an old friend."

"I won't—I won't," asseverated Mr. Chandos.

"Thanks. Look here, I'll give you my card, so that you can write to me if anything turns up."

He pulled out an old and rather greasy pocket-book, and extracted a card. It read:

"ROBERT RAWDON,

*Teacher of Elocution and History,*

No. 28 Clongate Street, Barnstaple."

"I'd ask you to come and see me, but my diggings are too shabby for you, and I'm ashamed to do so. I'm awfully hard up. If—if you can lend me a fiver, for God's sake, do so, Armitage."

"My de-ar fellow!" murmured Mr. Chandos, who, though he had taken more than was good for him, was not quite intoxicated, "I should be delighted, delighted; but, unfortunately, I have left my purse at the hotel. Good-night, and God bless you!"

"Good-night," said Rawdon, rather dryly. "Here, you haven't taken the card."

"Bless me—yes!" said Mr. Chandos; and he took it and stuck it in his waistcoat pocket, and hurried off, little dreaming how soon he would find his old friend useful.

Mr. Chandos went to bed and slept heavily, to wake the next morning with a "head on." To Dane came the sleep which blesses the strong and the temperate, though it was haunted by dreams in which he swam for dear life in the currents of the Taw, and fancied himself floating out to sea with an angel, whose face was singularly like that of Lyra Chester, hovering over him and keeping death at arm's-length.

But the sleep-god refused to settle on the eyes of Lyra until the night watches had faded into the hours of the cool gray dawn.

And when she fell asleep it was to dream that Dane Armitage was sitting by her in his wet clothes, his arms folded be-



hind his head, his eyes, with their frank, pleasant smile, resting on her.

She woke with a start to remember—it flashed upon her in the first moments of consciousness—that he had promised to come again that day.

Would he come? Was it not more likely that he would forget all about it; that, tired of the place and of his adventure, he would take the first train back to London, to that world which was so unknown to her, so full of mystery and enchantment?

She went down and into the garden and looked round, and instinctively her eyes wandered to the seat on which he had sat.

Was it only yesterday that he had sat there? It seemed ages and ages ago; it seemed as if she had known him for years, as if he had become a part of her life's history.

Mr. Chester, coming down, found her leaning against the porch, the pigeons and the chickens fluttering round her, and for the first time disregarded.

“Is there to be any breakfast this morning, Lyra?” he asked. And she did not notice that his voice was more than usually querulous.

She went in and poured out his coffee for him; but she was strangely silent. It seemed to her that she could not talk, as if something were going to happen, and as if she were waiting for it.

Once or twice she caught herself listening, and at such times she started half guiltily and blushed.

“Father,” she said, at last, “Lord Armitage has promised to come here this morning and show me how to fish. May I go with him?”

Her father looked up from the book which always lay beside his plate, an old edition of Quarles's “Emblems.”

“What?” he said, absently. “May you go where? Yes, yes; why do you ask?”

She went outside into the garden again after breakfast, and fed the pigeons; but she had no word for them that morning, and threw them their corn with her eyes fixed on the sands, which soon would be covered by the tide—the tide which had nearly swept *him* out of life yesterday.

Nine, ten o'clock was struck by the tall, rusty-tongued clock on the stairs, and still he did not come.

She plucked a rose from the bush from which she had gathered one for him yesterday—or was it years ago?—and was going into the house with a strange feeling of sadness and disappointment weighing heavily upon her, when suddenly she heard a footstep.

It might have been Griffith's, the maid's; but she knew it was neither. She stood, her heart beating wildly—why, why, she asked herself, with a kind of fierce resentment—then she heard his voice at the gate and went to meet him.

His eyes, with the frank smile in them—and—and was there something else? something more tender and gentle than a smile?—dwelt on hers.

“Am I too early?” he asked.

Her heart bounded with a kind of amazement at the question. Too early? Why, had she not been waiting hours, days, months?

“N-o,” she said; and she knew her voice faltered. “N-o; I am quite ready;” and she gave him her small, softly warm hand.

Oh, Love, cruel Love! Here is one who has done you no harm, one so innocent, so pure, so free from earthly taint that surely you will, must, spare her. But Love has no pity.

“God made woman perfect; man spoiled her; Love redeems her.”

“I've got the rod,” said Dane. “Shall we go at once? The trout are rising, I think.”

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## CHAPTER VII.

DANE and Lyra walked side by side up the valley, and at first they were rather silent. Perhaps Dane was engaged in listening to the chidings of his guilty conscience; perhaps she was rather overwhelmed by the strangeness and novelty of the situation. It was the first time in her life that she had been alone with a man, young, pleasant, and good to look upon; and perhaps she was too full of wonder at his graciousness in coming all the way from Barnstaple to take the trouble of teaching her to fish. Certainly, *her* silence was not caused by a guilty conscience. She did not know that she was sinning against the conventionalities in spending the morning alone with him; that she ought to have had a chaperon with her.

They walked through the little wood with the sun shining through the leaves and touching her hair with flecks of gold, and emerged into the clearer valley.

“What a lovely morning,” she said at last, and almost to herself.

Dane shook his head.

“Rather too fine for our work,” he said, eying the sun and bright blue sky reproachfully.

“Really?”

"Yes, it's a bit too bright; you see, the trout can see you afar off, and see the line, and recognize the fact that the flies are made of feathers, and have a suspicious-looking hook underneath them. But, never mind, perhaps we shall have some luck, and it will cloud over and rain. Though," he added, glancing at her simple morning frock, which for all its simplicity seemed to him the prettiest dress, the most becoming he had ever seen. Once again, as he looked at her, he thought of pictures he had seen in the illustrated papers and the Academy. She was like one of the girls Lester paints so exquisitely; the lovely, frank-eyed, innocent school-girl, with the promise of a more lovely womanhood shining in those eyes—"though I'm afraid you'd get wet, and that wouldn't do."

She smiled.

"Oh, it would not matter. I am used to getting wet, and I have nothing on that will spoil. This frock," she added, answering his glance at it, "is as old as the hills."

"All right," he said. "I'll put up the rods now. This is yours."

"What a pretty one!" she said; "and it looks quite new."

"Yes," he said, with a fine suppression of the truth; he did not want her to think he had bought it specially for her. "I haven't used it much. I hope it will suit you, that it won't be too heavy;" and he spoke as anxiously as if a kingdom depended upon it.

She whisked it to and fro in the awfully reckless fashion of the novice, and Dane thought to himself, "She'll smash the top the first go off; glad I brought a second one."

"Now I'll show you how to run the line in. See? Now you put on the gut—the 'collar,' as they call it; you see, it's as fine as a hair and the color of water; and now for the fly. Let me think—yes," he selected an artificial fly from his book and put it on the gut line. "Pretty, isn't it?"

"Yes; but it doesn't look very much like a real fly," said Lyra, critically.

"Oh, it does when it is on the water. It would take a very clever fish to detect the difference. And now I'll show you how to throw it."

"I think I'd rather watch you do it for a few times," said Lyra, with becoming modesty.

"All right," he said.

He put up his own rod quickly, advanced to the stream cautiously and threw the fly lightly, and Lyra, as she watched him, discovered that the art of fly-fishing was, at any rate, a very graceful one. He whipped the stream for a hundred



yards or so, but the sun was streaming on the water, and the fish saw him and refused to be caught; and he came back to her with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Too bright," he said. "Never mind, it will be practice for you. Now hold your rod like this, firmly, but still lightly, don't you know."

It was necessary, absolutely necessary, that he should place her fingers round the rod, and for a moment or two he inclosed her small hand in his; but Lyra was too absorbed in her endeavors to follow his instructions to notice it, though the touch of her hand throbbed through him.

"That's right; now creep quietly to the stream—not too close—and throw the fly like this—see?"

Lyra raised the rod, and hurled, literally hurled, the fly at the water, so that every trout within sight and hearing was scared to death, and fled wildly up stream.

"Oh, dear!" she said, ruefully; "and it looked so easy."

He laughed encouragingly.

"So do most things till you try 'em. Sewing looks easy enough when you're watching a lady do it, but I expect I should find it pretty difficult. Don't you be down-hearted; that wasn't a bad throw—for the first," he said, mendaciously. "Try again—here, let me hold your hand and guide it. Now then—let the rod go of itself, it only wants a movement of the wrist—see? That's better. I told you you could manage it."

"But you threw that," remarked Lyra, gravely.

"Not altogether," he said. "Now try by yourself. That's better. Now another—let the line describe a curve and fall naturally, lightly. See! That was a fish rose that time; it was indeed."

"Was it? I didn't see it," she said, eagerly.

"That's because you've not got used to looking out for them," he responded, promptly. "Presently you'll get as sharp as a hawk. Now I'm going to step back and leave you a full hand."

Lyra at once took advantage of it to throw the fly over her shoulder, and nearly caught him in the face with it. He grinned behind her back; it was not the first time he had taught the art, and knew his danger.

He stood and watched her, and as he watched, he forgot his business in rapt admiration. The lithe figure, as it raised itself to its full height and swung its arm, the poise of the beautifully shaped, golden-hued head filled him with an ecstatic delight which shone in his eyes. She looked over her shoulder,

and very nearly caught the expression, which he rapidly changed to an impersonally critical one.

"Is that better?" she asked, anxiously.

"It's perfect," he replied, off his guard for a moment. "I—I mean that it's much better. Don't throw hard—as lightly as you can, remember."

"Do you think I shall catch any fish?" she asked, innocently, after two or three more throws.

"I'm certain you will," he responded, with a shameless disregard of the truth. "If it would only cloud over!" he muttered, fervently. He had set his heart upon her catching at least one.

"There is a cloud over there," said Lyra, nodding toward the west.

"So there is," he said, hopefully. "I'll smoke a pipe; it generally brings rain."

She laughed softly. The gentlest joke of this young man brought the laughter to her lips and eyes.

"But this must be very wearisome for you, Lord Armitage?" she said presently, and after a dozen throws. "You will be very sorry you offered to teach me."

"Perhaps I shall," he assented. "Anyhow, I'll tell you when I'm tired of it; that's a bargain, eh?"

She nodded.

"Is your arm getting tired?" he asked presently, and in a gravely tender tone.

She shook her head.

"No, no; not in the least. Do you know, I think I saw one run at the fly just then."

"Very likely," he said, knowing that no fish would venture within a hundred yards of the flopping fly. "You shouldn't say 'run,' because, as a matter of fact, fish don't run. Say 'rise!'"

"Yes," she assented, with a meekness that instantly made him feel like a brute for correcting her.

She made her way slowly up the stream, and he walked beside her, out of reach of the hook, and she cast the fly for some minutes in silence. He could see that she was trying her hardest. Her brows were drawn straight, the firm, expressive lips were shut closely, her eyes were fixed on the stream. It was evident that she had almost forgotten him, and he smoked, and watched her with a continued sense of infinite pleasure and satisfaction.

Fly-fishing is the poetry of sport. You wander beside a sil-

ver stream that babbles rippling music, to which the birds keep up a soft and constant accompaniment. The trees are in their freshest greenery; the banks are gemmed with wild-flowers, rustic gentian, graceful rushes, velvety moss. A butterfly flutters from flower to flower; a dragon-fly, in all the glory of its gorgeous summer dress, soars over the water, chased by a still more gorgeous kingfisher. The air is soft, balmy, and full of a strange and mystic charm. On such a morning one realizes how truly the poet understood the case when he sung:

“ In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnished dove;  
In the spring a young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.”

Dane, as he followed Lyra, all unconsciously was thinking of her—and of love.

How innocent, how unconscious she was! Most girls would have thought more of their companion, of their pose, how they looked, and whether he was admiring them; but this girl had evidently forgotten herself and him, was completely absorbed in her lesson. Some day, he thought, some man will come along and win her heart, wake the love in it, and she will turn those beautiful eyes upon him with a look that ought, if it does not, send him half mad with joy and rapture.

Yes, that would happen some day, and to some lucky fellow. He sighed. The sigh startled her, and she stopped and looked at him.

“ You are getting tired, Lord Armitage,” she said.

“ Oh, no!” he said, hastily, for she had startled him by her sudden turn. “ But I’m afraid you will be, and then I shall never forgive myself. Look here; I’ll take a few turns. Never mind; I’ve left my rod behind there.”

“ Won’t mine do?”

He took the rod; the butt was warm with her grasp; it was almost as good as clasping her hand.

“ Thanks,” he said. “ It ought to bring me luck.”

As it happened, the cloud floated over the sun just then, and his opportunity came. Throwing with the greatest care, he got a rise; the next moment a trout, gleaming like silver, lay flopping on the grass at her feet.

Lyra started back with a little cry, then blushed and laughed shamefacedly.

“ It was so sudden,” she said. “ How *did* you manage it? How pretty it looks! It—it seems rather a pity to catch it.”

He laughed.

“ For goodness’ sake, don’t say that,” he said. “ Fish are



meant to be caught—and eaten; and he has had his amusement. Don't say it's wicked, like Theo—"

"Like Theodosia?" she said. "I remember. No, I won't, for I don't think there is any harm in it."

He put the trout in the basket hanging at his back, and with a glance at the sky, handed her the rod.

"Now then! I'll wager a thousand to one that you catch a trout now. It wasn't your fault altogether that you haven't done so before. Now, carefully, and very lightly, mind! You see that broken water there—that little eddy in front of that stone; throw the fly there. Just let it drop. That's it! Again—lightly, mind!"

She threw the fly, and fairly well; and, as much to his delight as hers, caught a trout. Of course she jerked it out as if it weighed at least a ton and a half, and of course it went whirling round her head two or three times, narrowly missing Dane's eyes and nose.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "When will it stop!"

He caught the line, unhooked the fish, and showed it to her, his eyes aglow with pleasure in her pleasure and satisfaction.

"And I really caught it?" she exclaimed. "It doesn't sound possible!" She began to prepare for another then immediately.

"Well, what do you say to fly-fishing now?" he asked, with a smile.

"It is delightful!" she said. There was silence for awhile, and presently she caught a couple more. A bright light shone in her eyes, a delicious color warmed the clear ivory of her cheeks, her lips smiled gratefully upon him.

"I understand it now," she said, thoughtfully.

"Yes; you only want to catch a trout to get the angling mania," he said, laughing. "You're sorry you didn't know the art before, aren't you?"

"Yes," she said; "and I should never have thought of trying if you had not been kind enough to teach me. And, oh, what a trouble I must be to you! It must be so much nicer to fish one's self than teaching some stupid person."

"That's all right," he said; "and don't call yourself names. You're quicker at it than most people."

"Than the young lady you call Theodosia?" she asked, innocently.

"Oh, yes; ever so much!" he replied, briefly. "And now, what do you say to moistening the fish? It's generally

done at this stage—just enough to encourage the rest, you know.” He had changed the subject quickly.

“Moistening the fish?” she asked. Though she had learned to catch trout, she had not yet acquired the angler’s slang.

He drew a silver sherry flask from his pocket.

“We really moisten ourselves, but we put it the other way, out of politeness to the fish. I don’t know whether you’re hungry—you ought to be; I am, fearfully. Shall we sit down and get some lunch?”

She looked the picture of self-reproach.

“Oh, I am so sorry; but I—I quite forgot to bring anything!”

“That’s all right,” he responded, cheerfully, in his pet phrase. “I thought of it. See!” He dived into his pocket and produced a sandwich-case.

“I’m afraid they’ll taste of trout,” he said. “They always do, however carefully you wrap ’em up in paper or tin. Where’s a nice place?”

He found a boulder standing up in the mossy grass, and flicked the top of it with his handkerchief.

“There’s a seat for you,” he said. “Give me your rod. Or, better still, why not sit on the grass and lean against the stone. That’s the thing. I hope it’s comfortable?”

“It’s as good as an arm-chair,” she said.

He opened the by no means small sandwich-case, and extended it to her.

“Own up that you’re hungry, now?” he said.

Lyra laughed softly, her eyes reflecting the happy, careless smile in his.

“You needn’t be afraid,” he said. “There’s enough for three; it’s wonderful what this case holds.”

Sandwiches are, as a rule, tasteless and deceptive fare; but on this lovely morning, in this pure and flower-scented air, with the stream making music, with the bright June sun shining down from the blue sky, sandwiches took to themselves a new and delicious flavor, and seemed a banquet fit for the gods.

Dane dropped down beside her and extended his long length on the spring grass, and eat with the happiness and content of the Lotus-eater.

“I wish I’d brought some champagne,” he murmured, presently. “I could have put a small bottle in the basket easily enough. I’m an idiot.”

“Do you like it so much?” she said, ingeniously. “I never tasted it.”

"I wish I had brought some more than ever, now! And, oh! by George, I forgot to bring a glass! You don't mind drinking out of the cup at the bottom of the flask? Shall I put some water with the sherry?"

"I think I'll have plain water," she said. "I seldom or ever drink wine."

"I don't think—mind, I'm not sure—but I don't think you can moisten the fish properly with water. They prefer wine."

He half filled the cup of the flask with water and filled it up with the sherry—not public-house sherry, but from the famous Starminster cellars.

"It is very nice," said Lyra. "But what are you going to drink out of?"

"Oh, the same cup will do," he said as nonchalantly as he could. "I take my sherry neat."

He would not have washed the cup for worlds, and he tried to notice from which side she drank that he might drink from the same.

"Another sandwich? Why is it that one enjoys one's grub—I beg your pardon—*lunch* so much more in the open air than in-doors?"

"I don't know," said Lyra, dreamily. "But who would not rather be out-of-doors than in such a day as this? How you must enjoy fishing, and eating your lunch like this—a quiet picnic all by yourself!"

"Yes," he said—"sometimes. But sometimes it isn't so pleasant." He leaned back on his elbow, and looked up at her exquisite profile with a perfect contentment. "I remember once, when I was on the Rockies—the Rocky Mountains in America—hunting a grizzly bear, when I should much have preferred to have been in-doors."

"Yes," she said, looking down at him, with almost childish eagerness in her eloquent eyes.

"Yes; it was a beast of a day—was snowing hard, had been snowing for weeks—months, I should think. I'd been out on the track since early morning, and in the middle of the day I thought I'd have a snack, as we are doing now. I'd got the same sandwich-case and flask, by the way."

She glanced at them as if they had suddenly acquired a new interest in her eyes.

"I sat down in a kind of cave—just in the mouth of it—out of the snow, and was enjoying myself as much as a man can when he's bitterly cold, and knows, by the best of all evidences, that he has got several pounds of snow down his back, when I saw a shadow across the mouth of the cave, and the



next moment the owner of the shadow appeared. It was an Indian, and *not* one of a friendly tribe. In fact, as Artemus Ward says, 'all Injuns,' whether friendly or not, 'are p'ison.' This gentleman looked anything but pleasant, and he eyed my flask and sandwich-case with an expression which plainly showed that he wouldn't mind adding them to his family plate. He'd got a rifle and a scalping-knife, and"—he broke off as he saw her shudder—"my rifle lay near my hand, but I knew that if I reached out for it, he would shoot me before I could raise it to my shoulder; and so, though I should much have preferred putting a bullet through him, I made friendly signs to him, and offered him a sandwich. Now, an Indian, of whatever tribe, will eat anything. They most live on grasshoppers and dogs—dogs count as a luxury. So he took all the sandwiches that remained—there was very little pride about him—and put the sandwich-case in his pocket."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Rough, wasn't it? Then he pointed to the flask. I made signs to him to hold out his tin cup and I'd give him some, but he shook his head and pointed to the flask. Now, I'd had that flask a long while. It was an old friend, and I don't hold with parting with a friend without a struggle, so I shook *my* head."

He gave a charming grunt and raised his gun, and I should have been an interesting corpse shortly afterward, but at that moment— This is a true story, Miss Chester."

"Oh, yes, yes!" she breathed, eagerly. "Please go on!"

"Well, at that moment we both heard a growl behind me, and out of the darkness of the cave came something that looked like a huge rusty mat on two legs, with another couple of legs pawing the air."

"The—the bear!" breathed Lyra.

"It was the bear—yes; and a remarkably fine and vicious one. I threw myself on my face. Off went the gun, and I wondered whether I was shot or going to be chewed into small pieces, when, looking up, I saw the Indian on the ground and the bear on top of him. He sprung over me." Lyra uttered a cry—only a woman can do it—a combination of horror and relief. "I scrambled to my feet and snatched up my rifle; but the bear and the man were so beautifully mingled that I was afraid to fire for a moment or two, and when I did, I missed with the first barrel, but with the second I stretched the bear on the top of the Indian, as dead as a herring!"

Lyra drew a breath of relief.

"That was returning good for evil," she said; and the

quiver in her voice showed, though she smiled, how much this story had affected her. "How grateful and ashamed of himself he must have been!" she added.

"Ahem! Well, that's the proper kind of ending to the adventure, I'm aware," said Dane, with a laugh; "but, to tell the truth, it didn't finish up in that story-book kind of way. No, your Indian is never grateful, and couldn't be ashamed if he tried. Directly he got up on his feet and found he wasn't dead, he remembered that he had another charge in his gun, and that it was a pity the flask shouldn't go with the sandwich-box, so he aimed at me again. You can't believe it?" He rolled up the sleeve of his Norfolk jacket and bared his arm, and Lyra saw a furrow drawn, as if by a red pencil, across the flesh. "I put up my arm and caught it there, instead of my head, and then I gently knocked him down with the butt end of my gun."

He laughed with lazy enjoyment of the reminiscence.

"Did—did it kill him?" inquired Lyra.

"For the sake of society, I regret to say it didn't. He came to after a bit, and didn't seem at all offended. He helped me skin the bear and cook some of the ham, and was gracious enough to join me at dinner. We parted very good friends, though he was quite forgetting to give me back the flask, and was walking off with it, until I reminded him. But I beg your pardon! I'm like the fellow in Shakespeare, who was so fond of bragging about his exploits. What was his name? oh, Othello. He used to spin impossible and wonderful yarns to Desdemona."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

HE made the comparison innocently, unintentionally enough, and Lyra smiled at first, then, as it came home to her, a blush rose to her face. He did not see it—he had lighted his pipe, and was smoking in happy ignorance. Though he did not know it, he had told the story very well and simply, and he had, all unwittingly, presented to her another picture of himself to add to the gallery of her memory. It seemed to her wonderful that he who had gone through so much, had courted peril and danger in wild and distant countries, should be content to lie there at her feet and smoke with half-closed eyes.

"Well," he said presently, "this is very delightful, but it isn't business. We've got to fill that basket between us, you know."

"I am quite ready," she said, springing up.

"I think I'll change your fly," he said. "The March brown fly is on the water. Do you see them? those little fellows with the long tails. Look; here's an imitation one. Now, I'll show you how to put it on, so that you may do it when I'm not here."

It is easy enough to put a fly on the line—when you know how—but you want showing, and in being shown your hand and your head must of necessity be brought very close to your instructor's. Lyra was intent upon her lesson, and perhaps—perhaps she did not notice that her hair now and again touched his cheek, that her hands and his were now and again in close contact; but Dane Armitage came out of the lesson with a slightly heightened color, and as she turned away with her rod, and an "oh, thank you, thank you! I shall not forget," his conscience—that troublesome conscience of his—smote him, and he registered a vow that he would not risk the touch of her hands again.

But the force of circumstances was against him.

He kept away from her, behind her, for some time; but he watched her, and could see that she was catching a trout now and again. He caught some too, but his eyes were more intent upon her than his fly.

Presently he noticed that she had ceased fishing, and was standing looking at the water in an absent kind of way.

He strode up to her.

"Tired?" he said.

"I am a little, I think," she said, with an apologetic glance. "My arm aches, only just a little. I can't understand it, this rod is so light."

"Give it to me," he said. "Halloo, you've lost your fly; the line's broken; a fish must have run off with it. I know that kind of ache in the arm. You walk beside me, or will you sit down? I don't care whether I fish or not."

"No, no," she said, eagerly. "Please go on, and I will watch you. I shall learn a great deal that way."

"How keen you are," he said, gratefully, admiringly. "It's awfully good of you." As he spoke he thought that she looked rather pale. "You are sure you would rather not rest?"

"Quite," she said. "Please go on."

He fished on, and she walked beside him. The clouds came up again, and, to his satisfaction, it began to rain; to his satisfaction, because, for some unaccountable reason, Master Trout will take the fly more readily when it rains. Dane caught them continually, and, in the true sportsman's absence of mind, forgot that his companion was getting wet. Who



cares in the hunting-field whether the ladies are getting wet, or otherwise coming to grief? Who of us, alas! when the yacht is going well before the wind, cares whether the ladies on board are sick or well? Man is a selfish animal. The sporting man—well, the least said the soonest mended.

But presently Dane woke up to the fact that it was raining hard, and that the girl beside him had no mackintosh, and, of course, no umbrella.

“Good gracious!” he exclaimed, dropping his rod. “What a selfish brute I am! You are getting wet all this time.”

“Am I? I did not know it—notice it,” she said, carelessly.

“It does not matter.”

“Oh, doesn’t it?” he said, with the irony of self-reproach.

He looked round for shelter for her, but there was absolutely none save an old thorn bush.

“Come along,” he said, making for it. “That will shelter you a little. I wouldn’t have you wet for worlds. Why, what would Mr. Chester say, and rightly? It would be a long time before he trusted you out with me again.”

“It isn’t of the least consequence,” repeated Lyra. “I am wet most days when it rains; and you know it rains here for months at a time sometimes.”

“Does it? Cheerful climate. Anyway, you are not going to get wet through to-day.”

They had reached the thorn bush, and he stood in front of her to protect her from the drifting rain; but he saw that it was poor protection, and he took off his thick Norfolk jacket of Harris tweed.

“Put this over your shoulders,” he said, in a matter-of-fact way.

Lyra drew back.

“Why, you would get wet through!” she said, almost indignantly.

“Not a bit of it. Besides, it wouldn’t matter. I was wet yesterday, you know”—his voice sunk a little—“and I didn’t catch cold, as you see. The rain can’t hurt me;” he touched his shirt sleeve. “Flannel—see?”

He put the coat over her shoulders, but she made a gesture of refusal.

“Please put in on again. I will not have it,” she said.

He laughed with a boyish maliciousness.

“I’ll pitch it in the river if you don’t let it stop where it is!” he declared.

Lyra could not help laughing, though her brows were drawn straight with determination.

"Oh, but that is absurd—foolish!" she remonstrated.

"I dare say. I don't care. Come, you pretended to be very grateful to me just now—"

"Pretended!"

"Well, were grateful. Show it by being obedient."

She bit her lip, but he had his way, and the warm coat sheltered her.

"We are in for a biggish storm," he said, looking up at the sky. "What an idiot I was to forget that this is Devonshire, and not bring a mackintosh! My mackintosh would have covered you from head to foot."

"I wish you had brought it," she said. "You would have kept your coat then."

She put up her hand to take it off, and he put up his and took her arm to prevent her; as he did so, she uttered a cry of pain.

His hand dropped, and he looked at her aghast.

"Oh, I hurt you!" he said in a voice of remorse.

"No, no!" she faltered. "Indeed you did not."

"But I did—I must have done. What a rough, clumsy brute I am!"

She bit her lip as if to force herself to silence, but his remorse and penitence constrained her to speak.

"It—it is nothing," she said, carelessly—too carelessly; "but the fly—the hook."

"The fly—the hook? Well," he demanded, anxiously, "what about it?"

She held out her arm, then put it behind her and laughed.

"I caught it in the sleeve of my dress, and—and in trying to get it out I've run it into my arm."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed; "and I've caught hold of it and—and—sent it in further! Please let me look."

She extended her arm again, and he saw that the hook of the fly had gone above the barb through the delicate skin. Now, when this is the case, you can not once in a hundred times pull the hook out. It is a small matter, just a tiny piece of bent steel, but there it is, fast and firm; the more you try to extract it, the more it sticks, and every time you touch it, the more pain you inflict.

Dane knew that there was only one way of getting that fly out, and at the thought his face paled beneath its tan.

"It's of no consequence; it will come out presently," she said. "I will get Mary to pull it out when I get home. It is clearing up now; shall we go on? Take your coat, please."

"Stop!" he said, looking at her and still holding her hand.  
"Neither Mary nor any one else can pull that hook out."

She opened her lovely eyes at him.

"No? Why? I couldn't just now, but I thought that was because I only had the left hand to do it with."

"No," he said; "it is because the barb on the hook has gone in. Miss Chester—I—I shall have to cut it out."

He stood with compressed lips and a look on his face as if he had said, "I must cut off your arm."

Lyra laughed easily.

"Really?"

"Yes," he said; "and—and I am afraid I shall hurt you."

She laughed as easily as before.

"Not much, I should think," she said. "Such a little cut as it must be for such a tiny hook."

"You don't mind pain?" he asked.

"Not such a little as that would be," she said. "Can I not cut it out myself? The trouble I have been to you this morning!"

"You can not," he said. "What an idiot I was not to warn you! It's my fault."

"That I was so clumsy as to catch the hook in my arm?" she said. "It is a wonder that I have not caught you with it."

"Would to Heaven you had, instead of yourself; that wouldn't have mattered!" he rejoined. As he spoke he took the scissors out of the fly-book in his jacket pocket. "I must cut the sleeve," he said.

"That's of no consequence," she said, carelessly.

He cut a square piece out, and revealed a patch of the white arm with the malicious little hook sticking in it.

"Look another way," he said, with a queer huskiness in his voice as he opened his pen-knife.

Lyra obeyed for a moment, but naturally her eyes turned to the hook again; and then she saw that his face had turned pale, though his hands were as steady as a rock. She noticed, too, how softly, how tenderly he held her arm—this great strong man who had faced, courted death in strange lands.

"Are you afraid," she asked, with a smile—"afraid of my calling out? I shall not, I promise you."

"Yes," he said, still huskily; "I am afraid of hurting you, and yet I must do it, for Mary would hurt you more than I shall."

She laughed.

"Please go on," she said. "It is such a trifle."

"Not to me," he muttered, below his breath, and with a



palpitation at the heart. He would have done much, suffered much to gain a moment's happiness, transient pleasure, for this innocent girl; and now he was fated to hurt her—hurt her in cold blood, with the lovely eyes looking on.

He set his teeth hard, and cut out the hook. He dared not look up at her, lest she should see in his eyes the emotion, the passionate emotion that raged within him.

It was a tiny cut, and she did not cry out or wince even, though, for all its smallness, the operation was a painful one.

His hand closed gently, tenderly over the miniature wound, and he raised his eyes.

They must have told the secret that was throbbing through his heart; they must have said that which he kept from uttering with his lips at a cost almost insupportable. There must have been, "I love you! I love you!" in the intense gaze of his eyes, for Lyra caught her breath and drew back slightly, very slightly, and the color left her face.

"I have hurt you, Lyra!" he exclaimed, almost hoarsely. "Lyra—dearest! I have hurt you, I who love you! Love you!"

She drew back from him, put out her hand as if to keep him—his almost fiercely passionate avowal—away from her.

She was startled, frightened, and yet—ah, was it fear only that made her heart throb with a sensation that was almost painful?

He caught her hand and pressed it against his heart. All the passion of a strong man caught in the toils of a love as strong as himself had got possession of him, and yet the caress, for caress it was—was gentle, reverential.

"Lyra"—his voice sounded strangely in his own ears—"I love you! Yes, I know—I know! I ought not to say it here, now, but—but I can not help myself! Do you hear? I love you! Are you angry? Forgive me, I would rather die than frighten you—but to have hurt you when I love you so dearly, so dearly—"

He stopped suddenly. The coat had dropped from her shoulders as she stood with her hands pressing against her bosom to still the beating of her heart, stood panting as if for breath. The coat slipped, and as it slipped, something white fell from the pocket, and dropped on the ground between them. It was an unopened letter, and it fell with the address upward.

Her eyes followed it, and his followed hers. He started, and the blood rushed to his face, then left it, and left it absolutely white.

She glanced from the letter to his face, and then to the letter again. At that moment—why, she knew not—it seemed as if the innocent-looking thing had grown into a sheet of snow, and reared itself between her heart and his—an impassable barrier.

She pointed to it; she could not speak. He stood panting as she had panted; then, like a man suddenly dazed, he stooped and picked up the letter, and mechanically, with absolute unconsciousness, opened it, unfolded the sheet of paper, and as mechanically read the contents.

“DEAR DANE,—Your father has the gout in his hand, and asks me to write and beg you to come home. I don’t add my entreaties, because it is evident from your not having answered my last two letters that you have forgotten      Your  
“THEODOSIA.”

That was all. But it was as a voice from the thunderous sky. It was the voice which bid him choose between love and honor.

He stood with the letter in his hand, the cold sweat breaking out upon his brow.

“Your Theodosia!”

His eyes at last sought hers. She stood as if turned to stone.

Her woman’s wit had guessed that something had come between them. The barrier of snow was freezing her heart.

He stretched out his hand, then let it drop to his side, and his head hung like that of a man suddenly overwhelmed with shame.

“Lyra!” he said, hoarsely, almost inaudibly—“Lyra—forget—forgive! I— No, I can not lose you—I can not!”

He made a movement toward her; but she put out her hands.

“No! no!” she panted. “Let—me—go!”

His hands, which he had raised to seize hers, dropped to his side, and he turned away with a groan, as if he could not dare to gaze upon her.

For a moment she stood looking at him; then, with a shiver, as if the summer breeze had been charged with ice, she turned and left him.

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## CHAPTER IX.

LYRA left Dane standing as if turned to stone, and with unsteady, uncertain steps went down the valley toward home.

Her heart beat wildly one moment, and the next seemed to stop altogether.

A great overwhelming sense of misery swept through her, alternated by a strange feeling of wonder that was an ecstasy half of pain, half of joy.

She had read of love often, but it might almost be said that, until Dane had uttered the word with all the eloquence of passion, she had never heard it spoken.

His declaration had come upon her with the suddenness of a flash of lightning. And yet, sudden as it was, she understood it, and knew that he really loved her and that she returned his love.

As he spoke she learned suddenly, as in another lightning flash, why the sunlight had seemed to fade when he left her yesterday; why she had lain awake thinking of him; why the sight of him at the gate had made the heart within her leap with a strange, bewildering joy.

Love, this love of which she had read so much, was a real thing, then; and it had come to her, swept down upon her like an angel with widespreading wings, and soared with her into the highest heavens.

And yet she had understood quite as fully that something had come between her and Dane, that though he loved her and she loved him, that letter which had dropped between them had contained the death sentence of their happiness. His faltering, heart-broken words had told her that; and so she hurried through the undergrowth, scarcely knowing where she was going, and heedless of the brambles that caught at her as if trying to detain her and turn her back. She felt as if she had left not only her heart, but her life's blood behind, there where Dane stood with clinched hands and drooping head.

It is said that to every man and woman is given a soul for which a mate is specially created, that each human soul goes through the world seeking this mate. Sometimes it finds it—sometimes only, and ah! how rarely—and then there is joy and happiness unspeakable for those two fortunate souls; but too often the desolate spirit wanders over the earth, seeking the mate it shall never find, doomed, perhaps, to be tied to some spirit with whom it has nothing in common, and with whom it must lead a life of miserable discord, or fated to wander through the realms of space sobbing and wailing, a sad and unsatisfied and restless ghost, unloving and unloved.

Surely these two spirits, Dane's and Lyra's, had found each other. They were within sight of love's paradise, their locked hands were touching the gate, their feet were pressing the threshold, when lo! they had been thrust forth, the gates had



been elanged in their faces, and they were separated, to wander divided and miserable.

As Lyra made her way through the wood, she tried to realize all that had happened to her. Dane's passionate words rang in her ears as if they would ring there forever. Love, love; it was all love! She could feel his hands clasping hers still, could feel his eyes piercing through hers into the innermost recesses of her heart. He loved her, and yet she should never see him again. Something had come between them, had taken him from her forever—forever!

She uttered the words which have fallen from so many despairing lips, and clasped her hands over her eyes. It seemed as if a cloud had come over the heavens, and blocked out the sun and light.

She stopped, exhausted, and leaned against a tree, her hands pressed to her bosom as if to still the agony in her that racked it. As she stood thus, lost to all sense of sight and hearing, the bent figure of Griffith came along the narrow path. He had his bill-hook in his hand and a bundle of wood on his bent back. As he saw Lyra he stopped, dropped the wood, and limped to her side.

"Miss Lyra!" he exclaimed, hoarsely. "What is it? What is the matter?"

She turned her aching eyes upon him, as if she did not see or recognize him, and at the agony in her face he groaned with mingled pain and rage.

"What is it—what is it?" he said in his guttural voice, and he took her hand and pressed it. "Tell me—tell me, Miss Lyra, dear; tell me, dearie."

The sound of his rough voice, the touch of his hand, aroused her. With a long, painful sigh she raised her head and looked away from him.

"Nothing is the matter, Griffith," she said, in a voice from which all the brightness and joy had vanished. "I—I have been a long way, and—and am overtired."

His grasp of her hand grew tighter.

"A long way," he said—"only to the top of the valley? That shouldn't have tired you. Where—where is the gentleman that went with you? He was with you till just now."

He put the question with a kind of subdued ferocity, and gripped at her hand.

Her face grew paler, if possible, and her lips quivered.

"He has gone," she said; and the full significance of the words smote her with a fresh pang.

"Gone," he echoed, hoarsely—"and left you to come home

alone? Look; your dress is torn by the brambles. You are white and unhappy. Has he been saying anything to trouble you? Tell me, Miss Lyra, dear?"

The crimson burned in her face for a moment, then left it pale again.

"No—no," she faltered, brokenly; "he has said nothing. It does not matter. He has gone; he will not come back. We—we shall not see him again."

His small, glittering eyes scanned her face keenly.

"Are you telling me the truth—the whole truth, Miss Lyra?" he said, hoarsely. "If he has said anything to trouble you—if he—" He paused, with clinched teeth, then went on in a low, hoarse voice: "Miss Lyra, you won't keep anything from me? It's me, old Griffith, that asks you. You'll tell me, Miss Lyra, dearie. Years ago, when you were a little child, your mother left you. I was with her when she died. Almost her last words were: 'Griffith, you'll take care of my little one?' His voice gave way, but he mastered it, and went on: "She knew—your mother—that the master would be too broken to take care of you. She knew that you would want some one else—some one that would always watch over you. I promised her, Miss Lyra, dear, and—and I've kept my promise. Look back, dearie, and tell me if you can remember any time in your young life when you can not remember old Griffith."

Lyra could not speak, but pressed his hand.

"When you were ill like other children, it was for me, and not your nurse, that you used to cry. I've carried you in these arms for hours—ay, almost for days. I've watched you grow up, year by year, from a tiny mite to a beautiful woman, and there is not a wish of your heart that I haven't known. No dog ever loved its master as I've loved you. Miss Lyra, dear, I'd lay down my life for you, and be glad to do it!"

She pressed his hand again. His devotion, though it could not remove the aching in her young heart, soothed it.

"I know, I know, dear Griffith," she murmured, almost inaudibly.

"I've kept my oath, for it was an oath, and I mean to keep it till some one comes to take you from me, to win your heart away and teach you to forget me. I'll stand between you and trouble, Miss Lyra, if you'll let me. Tell me what has happened."

"Nothing, nothing," she faltered.

His rugged brows darkened above his sharp eyes.

"Something has happened," he said, doggedly. "If I

thought that gentleman had said anything to trouble you like this—”

He stopped, dropped her hand, and half turned, as if he were going in search of Dane. She caught his arm and held him.

“No, no, Griffith, he has said nothing. It is because he is too good and noble—” She stopped. “Stop, Griffith, I—I bid you. I am unhappy, but—but it is not his fault.”

“You are sure?” he demanded, almost fiercely.

“Yes,” she said, with a heavy sigh; “it is not his fault. You—you must not harbor anger against him, must not threaten him—for you did threaten him, Griffith.”

“Yes,” he assented, with sullen anger. “I’d threaten any one that would harm you or make you unhappy, Miss Lyra, dear. I’d—” He stopped, but his clinched hand and glittering eye finished the sentence graphically enough. “The faithful dog bites as well as barks when it sees its mistress attacked.”

“Yes, yes,” she said, soothingly, “I know, Griffith; but no one has attacked me. Do not say any more. Let us go home. I am very, very tired.”

Her head sunk, and she sighed again.

“Lean on me; put your hand on my shoulder, Miss Lyra,” he murmured, huskily. “Don’t be afraid. Why, those arms are strong enough to carry you still, old as I am.”

They went through the woods thus, Lyra pale and preoccupied, the hunchback with his eyes fixed on the ground, his gnarled lips emitting a kind of hoarse snarl at intervals, and had reached the clearing at the foot of the cliff, when suddenly a groan was heard by both of them. Lyra started, removed her hand, and uttered a faint cry.

“What was that? Did you hear it, Griffith?” she faltered. Instantly her fears flew to Dane. Could it have been he who had groaned? “Oh, what was it, Griffith?” she asked, in an agony.

“Hush! hush! Miss Lyra,” he said, almost imperatively; and he listened with his great head on one side.

The groan came again, and Lyra uttered another cry.

“There, there! You *must* have heard it, Griffith!”

“Yes, I heard,” he said, calmly. “Don’t be frightened, dearie. It came from the hollow of the cliff. Stay here while I go and see.”

“No, no,” she said; “I will come too.”

A mental vision of Dane in mortal peril rose before her.

Griffith, with his peculiar gait—a mixture of limp, spring,



and shamble—hurried in the direction of the sound, and Lyra followed closed behind him.

Where the wood ended in a waste of grass-grown sand, the range of cliffs, or downs, commenced. The sand, blown by the winds, was over them all. They were soft and graduating in places, but in others were steep and precipitous. As Lyra and Griffith hurried to the foot of these cliffs, the groan which had alarmed her sounded again.

Griffith's sense of sight and hearing were as keen and true as an Indian's, and he went straight for a clump of sand-sprinkled bushes from whence the cry of distress had proceeded. Lyra kept close behind him, and they both saw the figure of a man, half lying, half sitting, among the furze.

He was a fair young man, with light hair and pale-blue eyes, and he was very pale and woful-looking. It was Mr. Chandos Armitage, with his Bond Street clothes torn and covered with sand, and his delicate white hands scratched and bleeding.

At sight of Lyra and Griffith he uttered a doleful "Help!" and dropped back amid the furze. Griffith bent over him.

"What is the matter?" he muttered, in his rough, grating voice.

Lyra stood looking over his shoulder, her pale face expressive of apprehension—and, it must be said, relief; for it was not—thank Heaven!—it was not the beloved one—it was not Dane Armitage.

Mr. Chandos opened his eyes and groaned faintly.

"I've had an accident," he murmured, in acute accents of profound self-pity. "I've fallen over the cliff and broken my leg, I'm afraid. Oh!"

"Fallen over the cliff!" grunted Griffith. "Let me see."

"Don't touch me!" wailed the Honorable Chandos.

"Humph!" grunted Griffith, "you'll have to be touched, sooner or later, if you're to get away from here. Let me see. Which leg is it?"

"Oh, take care, Griffith," murmured Lyra, gently.

Mr. Chandos opened his eyes again, and as they rested on her lovely face their pale-blue light grew warmer and more admiring; but only for a moment, for his pain absorbed all his attention.

"Thank you, my dear lady," he said, sweetly; "this is the leg, my good man. I'm afraid it is broken in several places."

Griffith knelt down and examined the wounded member, Mr. Chandos watching with nervous apprehension.

"It isn't broken," said Griffith, after a moment or two.

"You've sprained your ankle, I think. Wait, I'll take off your boot."

"No, no!" responded Mr. Chandos, in nervous terror. "I must have a surgeon; you'll hurt me."

Griffith grunted grimly.

"Not I. Sit still, sir; I'll soon see what's the matter."

He took out a woodman's knife, at sight of which the elegant Mr. Chandos shuddered, cut the laces of the boot, and removed it.

"Yes," he said, "it's a sprain; there's no bones broken."

"I don't see how you can know; you're not a surgeon," said Mr. Chandos, querulously. "It's painful enough for half a dozen fractures."

"Very like," said Griffith, philosophically; "but there's no bones broken, all the same. How did you do it?"

Mr. Chandos leaned on one elbow, turned his blue eyes on the cliff, and then on Lyra.

"I was standing up there on the edge of the cliff, admiring the peculiarly mystic light on yonder hill, when the ground gave way beneath me, and I was precipitated where you see me," he wound up, rather prosaically.

Griffith grunted.

"And didn't you know any better than to stand on the edge of a sand-hill?" he said. "You'll be more knowing for the future. You've had a fall and sprained your ankle, that's all."

"That's all," retorted Mr. Chandos, who thought that it was a very great deal; "but I can't walk. I've tried to stand several times, without success. You will not desert me?"

He extended his pretty hand to Lyra with a charmingly pathetic gesture.

She drew back, for the voice, the gesture, the manner of the man repelled her, and it was Griffith who responded.

"Oh, we won't desert you, as you call it. I'll go and get something to carry you on."

"Let me," said Lyra, in a low voice.

"No," said Griffith, almost peremptorily. "You'd run all the way to the cottage and back, I know, and you're tired. You stay here, Miss Lyra. I sha'n't be long. You'd better keep your foot still," he added to Mr. Chandos, curtly, as he limped away.

Lyra, left alone with the disabled man, stood looking seaward. She felt dazed still; her heart was aching with a dull, gnawing pain. It is to be feared that she did not give much thought to the interesting sufferer.

But this left Mr. Chandos free to gaze upon her beautiful face, and he did so to the fullest extent; so fully that for the moment he forgot his broken bones, or sprain, and was lost in intense admiration of her loveliness.

Who was she, and whence did she come?

He thought he had never seen a more lovely, more interesting face; for her pallor, the sad expression in her eyes, lent her an additional charm in Mr. Chandos's opinion.

"I am afraid I am detaining you and giving you a great deal of trouble," he said, in his sweetest voice, with the "flute stop" well on.

Lyra started slightly and turned to him.

"Oh, no," she said. "Are you in much pain?"

She put the question with a tone of self-reproach. She had, indeed, almost forgotten him.

"Yes," he sighed. Mr. Chandos would have made an outcry over a pin-prick, and was not likely to make light of a sprain. "Yes," he murmured, "the pain is great; but pain has its consolations; the spirit is never keener or more *en rapport* with beauty than when it is stimulated by bodily anguish."

He made this remark in the proper esthetic manner, with the "flute stop" in his voice again, and with a sad look in his pale-blue eyes.

Lyra looked at him with a drear and weary questioning, and Mr. Chandos's gaze grew unsteady.

"I allude to the scenery—oh!" his foot gave him a twinge. "It is indeed beautiful. Doesn't it remind you of a Canaletti or a Burne-Jones? Oh!—oh, dear!"

Lyra continued to gaze at him.

"I am afraid I don't understand," she said.

"No? You are not acquainted with the works of these—oh!—oh!—these artists? That is a pity. The beautiful should know and be of kin with the beautiful."

It is to be feared that Lyra thought for the moment that the wounded man was either insane or delirious.

"But, pardon me, you look pale," said Mr. Chandos, after a pause. "I fear I have caused you some alarm."

A faint color came for a moment into Lyra's face, and he looked away across the river.

"No," she said, in a low voice. "I am not frightened."

"Oh!" murmured Mr. Chandos, tenderly. "It is the sympathy of your womanhood which is—oh!—oh, dear! oh, dear!—emblematic of the divine. Without sympathy, true sympathy, man is—whew!—little better than the beasts of the field. Will you not sit down and rest?"



Lyra shook her head. She was, with every word he uttered, more inclined to consider him a harmless lunatic.

Mr. Chandos nursed his foot for some moments in silence, then he said:

"Do you live far from here?"

"No," said Lyra. "Griffith will not be long—"

"Oh, I can wait, if not with cheerfulness, with resignation," he murmured. "Pain and patience seem appropriate to this desolate spot, this weird and impressive scenery. Do you—er—paint?"

"No," said Lyra. His suave, languishing voice grated on her and irritated her. She longed with a longing past description to be in her own room, alone; alone to think.

"That is a pity," he said. "I—er—am an humble but devoted servant of Art. I should like to sketch this stretch of sand, these—phew!—oh!—oh, dear!—mystic-looking hills. They would make an exquisite study in gray and chrome."

Lyra remained silent. How much longer would Griffith be?

"If you do not paint, you are a musician, I am sure—oh, dear!" resumed Mr. Chandos.

Lyra shook her head.

"No, I can not play," she said.

"In-deed! It seems scarcely credible. Your face—pardon me—is that of the Cecilian type. Cecilia is the patron saint of music, you know. But you sing; indeed, you must sing! Hah—oh!"

Lyra shook her head.

"Does your foot pain you still? Is there anything I can do, get, for you?"

"I fear not," he said, in the tone of an expiring martyr.

"I am very thirsty, it is true, but I fear there is no water—"

"I will get you some," she said.

She ran to the stream, made a cup of a large fern leaf, and brought it to him carefully.

"Thanks, thanks!" he sighed. "It is a draught from the stream of Isis." And he gazed up at her with a sentimental, languishing air. "I shall never forgive myself for all the trouble I have caused you. Ah—

" 'Woman, in our hours of ease,  
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,  
When pain and anguish wring the brow,  
A ministering angel, thou!'"

He mouthed the hackneyed lines in the most approved style of the modern school, and expected Lyra to blush and simper,

and the slightly surprised look in her large sad eyes rather disconcerted him.

"Are you fond of poetry?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lyra, wearily.

"I knew it," he murmured. "It were unnecessary to ask. Your face is the index of a poet's soul. I—er—am an humble but devoted servant of the divine Muse. Have you chanced—oh!—whew!—have you chanced to read these lines of mine—they are tolerably well known?"

" 'When in the dark and '—oh—whew!—' stilly night,  
I see the '—ah!—' flickering candle-light;  
What visions swarm '—oh, dear!—' around my head,  
And fill the curtains of my '—gracious!—' bed! ' "

"No," said Lyra.

"Yes," she thought, "he must be a madman escaped from some lunatic asylum."

"No? I thought they had penetrated even to such remote regions as this. Would you like—shall I repeat the remainder of the—oh! oh!—poem?"

"I do not think you should talk," faltered Lyra, soothingly.

"Do not forbid me the sweet consolation of conversing with my preserver," he murmured. "I forget my pain—almost—while exchanging these sweet reflections with one so—er—so capable of appreciating them as I am sure you are."

Lyra walked a little way toward the valley to render any further conversation difficult, if not impossible, and stood watching and waiting for Griffith.

At last, to her infinite relief, she saw him and Mary hurrying along.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come, Griffith!" she said. "I am afraid he is very ill; he has been talking so strangely."

Griffith grunted, and unfolded a thick rug.

"He's not so bad as he thinks, Miss Lyra," he said, almost within hearing of the martyr.

"Now, sir, let us put this rug under you, and we'll carry you to the master's cottage."

Mr. Chandos, with sundry groans and moans, got himself deposited on the impromptu stretcher, and was raised from the ground by Mary and Griffith.

"For God's sake, don't drop me!" he exclaimed, in an agony of apprehension.

"We sha'n't drop ye," said Griffith, curtly. "You're none so heavy."

"Be careful, be careful, I beg of you!" implored Mr. Chandos, as he swayed to and fro. "A sudden shock, a fall on this uneven ground, might—Heaven knows what it might do. Where is my fair rescuer?"

Griffith scowled over his shoulder at him.

"D'ye mean Miss Lyra?" he snarled.

"Yes, if that is her name—it is a sweet name—beg her not to leave me."

Lyra walked beside him.

"You are quite safe," she said, encouragingly.

"I feel it, I feel it, with you by my side," murmured Mr. Chandos; and he stretched out his hand with the expression of a man fast sinking; but Lyra probably did not see the hand, for her eyes were fixed on the river, and her thoughts far away, so that Mr. Chandos's delicate paw was fain to hang limp and disregarded over the rug.

They reached the cottage, and Mr. Chandos was deposited on the sofa to the accompaniment of a string of groans and moans and "oh, dears!"

Mr. Chester entered; he had been wandering along the river-bank with a book which he still held in his hand, and he not unnaturally stared at this eruption into his small and quiet sitting-room.

"What—what—?" he stammered, looking from one to the other vacantly.

"It is an accident, father," explained Lyra.

"To you?" he asked, looking at her pale, wan face.

She shook her head.

"No; to this gentleman. He has hurt his foot."

"I fear it is a bad, a very bad fracture," murmured Mr. Chandos. "I must apologize for this intrusion; but, indeed, if it had not been for the timely arrival—oh, dear!—of your daughter and man-servant upon the spot where I lay alone and helpless—"

Mr. Chester cut short the suavely flowing voice.

"What is it—what is the matter with him?" he asked, impatiently.

"Leave him to me and Mary, and we'll see," growled Griffith.

Mr. Chester and Lyra went out of the room.

"Are you frightened?" he asked, blinking at her pale face.

"Where have you been?"

She looked at him with all her new, strange misery in her eyes, and would have thrown her arms round his neck, and, with her face hidden against his breast, have poured out all



her trouble, had there been one spark of tenderness in his face or voice; but there was none.

"No, father," she said, "I am not frightened. I—I have been up the valley."

She passed him, and went slowly, with a dragging step, up the stairs, and was in her own room and alone at last. Alone, and free to recall again and again the scene between her and Dane!

What a different person was this wan girl who knelt beside her bed, with her face hidden in her hands, to the Lyra Chester who, with Love's music beginning to sing in her heart, had walked beside Dane Armitage up the valley! In that brief space of a few hours she had passed across that mystic brook which divides girlhood from womanhood; had learned the meaning of love, and, alas! of sorrow. She was confused, bewildered, still, but through all her vague misery there rose distinct and palpable the face of Dane Armitage, and though all else were uncertain, she knew that she loved him, that he had taken with him her heart and soul, and that without his love, his presence, her life must be one long yearning, one long pain.

While she drank to the dregs of the cup which Love pressed to her lips, Griffith and Mary removed Mr. Chandos's stocking, and Griffith was able to pronounce the injury a sprain and not a broken limb.

"You'll be all right in a day or two—a week at most," he grunted, as he wound a cold-water bandage round the ankle. "You don't want a doctor," he remarked to Mr. Chandos's querulous request that a doctor—the best in the place—might be fetched. "All you want is to rest your foot till the sprain's gone. I'll get you a fly from Barnstaple."

But this suggestion did not meet with Mr. Chandos's approval. He pictured to himself a week on a horse-hair sofa in the parlor of a provincial hotel, and shuddered at the vision. He looked round the shabby but cozy room, remembered Lyra, reflected that it would be far more pleasant to lie here within sight of the lovely face, within hearing of her musical voice, and resolved that he would remain at the cottage. Yes, it would be quite too delightful to spend the time conversing with and "cultivating" this beautiful girl who seemed to have no protector but an absent-minded father and a hunchback servant. Yes, he would stay.

"I—I really don't think I could bear removal," he murmured, with a deep sigh. "I am in great pain; and though the injury may be no greater than you say, my man, the jour-

ney to Barnstaple over these terrible roads of yours might aggravate it. Pray, ask your master—what is his name?”

“Chester,” growled Griffith.

—“Mr. Chester if he will take pity upon a wounded man, and give him shelter for a few days?”

Griffith eyed him with strong disfavor.

“You’re able to go to Ameriky!” he snarled.

“I think not, my good fellow,” said Mr. Chandos, with a sigh. “Please take my message to your master.”

Mr. Chester came in and blinked and stared at the visitor, and, in response to Mr. Chandos’s plaintive prayer, at once offered his hospitality.

“I suppose there is a room somewhere?” he said, vaguely, to Mary.

“Oh, yes, sir, we can put the gentleman up,” said Mary, to whom a visitor was an agreeable novelty and pleasurable excitement.

“Very well,” said Mr. Chester, absently. “We shall be very pleased if you will stay with us till you are able to—to walk, Mr.—”

Mr. Chandos was about to give his name, but paused and hesitated.

There are some men who prefer the ways of darkness to those of light—who seem incapable of “going straight.”

“My name is Geoffrey Barle”—he had published a volume of “poems” under that *nom de plume*—“Geoffrey Barle”—he said. “You may have heard of it?”

Mr. Chester shook his head.

“I—I hope you’ll be comfortable,” he said, absently; and made haste to get out and back to his book in the garden.

Mr. Chandos closed his eyes and drew a breath of relief and satisfaction. Yes, she certainly was a lovely creature, and worth “cultivating.” After all, notwithstanding his sprained foot, he was very lucky—very lucky!

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## CHAPTER X.

DANE made his way back to the hotel, and something of the storm that raged within him must have been visible in his face, for the waiter stared at him curiously and apprehensively, and shrunk away from him timidly, as Dane said:

“Get my bill at once, and send my things to the station.”

To put it shortly, he was as bewildered as Lyra—as bewildered, but even more troubled and sorrow-stricken, for our friend, the guilty conscience, contributed his quota.

Dane Armitage was not a good young man, by any means; but, with all his follies, he still had a keen regard for honor.

His creed was a very simple one, and honor was its key-stone. He was engaged to his cousin, Theodosia Hainault. That is to say, he was bound by a promise, had plighted his word, his oath, and as a gentleman he was bound hand and foot, heart and soul, by that plighted word. There are still some men whose word is as good as their bond, and Dane was one of them.

If he had promised to ride barebacked from London to Mesopotamia, he would have tried it, even if he had died in the effort. He had promised to marry his cousin Theodosia, and he must keep that promise.

In the supreme moment when he became conscious, when he realized that he loved Lyra Chester, he had for that moment forgotten Theodosia and his plighted word; but the letter, as it lay on the ground between him and Lyra, reminded him of it.

He stood between Love and Honor, and with such a man as Dane, Honor must, at all costs, win the day.

As Lyra had left him, as he watched her go, he felt that the joy, the hope of his life was going with her; but he made no sign, no effort to stop her. It was *noblesse oblige*. A better man, a "good" man, might have yielded, would probably have said, "Love before all," and gone after her; but not Dane.

The Starminsters had never broken their word, much less their plighted troth, and he could not do so. And yet he loved her as dearly, as passionately as ever man loved woman, and he knew that she loved him. He had read it in her face, her eyes, and yet he had to let her go.

All the way to the hotel her face haunted, tortured him. Not once nor twice, but many times he stopped short, tempted by the agonizing desire to go to her, to cast honor to the winds, and claim her for his own. But honor prevailed, at a cost no pen can describe.

They took his things to the station, and he paced up and down on surely that draughtiest of all platforms, the Barnstaple, till the London train steamed slowly in. He flung himself into a corner of a carriage and lighted his pipe; but for once the soothing weed refused to calm him.

There, on the opposite seat, sat, in his mind's eye, Lyra Chester. He could see the lovely, innocent face quite plainly, the grave, half-sad eyes seemed to gaze at him; he could hear her voice through the puffing of the engine, the rattle of the



wheels, the screeching of the whistle. There was not an incident of their brief acquaintance that he did not re-enact.

He felt himself drawn down by the current of the Taw, saw her beautiful face anxiously bent over him, put her arms—her dear arms!—round him. He saw her as, all unconscious of his gaze, she threw the fly over the stream, and, last and most bitter vision of all, there rose before him the vision of her standing pointing to the letter that lay on the ground between them.

It was the worst journey Dane Armitage had ever made, and it lingered in his memory for many a year.

When he got to Waterloo, he inquired how soon the next train started for Starminster.

The porter, after a great deal of inquiring, informed him that it started at midnight. Dane took a ticket, and spent a couple of cheerful hours marching up and down the platform, going over the whole thing again and again.

Once he was tempted to fling his ticket to Starminster on to the permanent way, and book for Barnstaple; but honor still prevailed, and he found himself in the Starminster train, wearied to death physically and mentally.

It is a long journey from classic Waterloo to Starminster, and it was getting on toward noon when Dane alighted from the train at the little country station.

The station-master, all the porters, knew him, and gathered around him, obsequiously eager to be of service; and between them, with much hustling and emulation, they got him a fly.

“Drive to Castle Towers,” he said, wearily, as he sunk back and pulled his traveling-cap over his aching eyes.

“To Castle Towers, not the Hall, my lord?” queried the driver, with respectful surprise.

Dane, I regret to say, swore.

“To Castle Towers!” he repeated.

The man gathered up the reins and whipped up his horse, and for the space of another half hour Lord Dane had the opportunity of ruminating over his misery. At the end of that time the fly lumbered up a spacious avenue and drew up at the terraced entrance of Castle Towers, the residence of Lady Theodosia Hainault.

As the fly stopped, Dane roused himself, looked round him and sighed.

The avenue, the far-stretching façade of the great house, the trimly kept hedges, the exquisitely arranged garden in front of the terrace, were all eloquent of wealth and smiling

prosperity—a marked, a striking contrast to the simple, shabby cottage which haunted him.

He got out; a couple of footmen hurried down the marble steps and bent their heads in respectful, reverential greeting.

“Is Lady Theodosia in?” he asked.

One of the men looked at him with veiled curiosity. Dane was pale, almost haggard, and remarkably travel-stained.

“Yes, my lord. In the library.”

Dane went slowly up the steps, dropped his hat on the hall table, and was ushered by another footman into the library.

It was a noble room, lined with books in book-cases of rose-wood picked out with ormolu and paneled with Wedgwood.

Seated in chairs round a table—but at a little distance—were two clergymen in the regulation dress, and a lady in widow’s weeds.

In a chair by the table sat a young lady dressed in black merino relieved by white—gleamingly, almost painfully—white collar and cuffs.

She was small, very small, but there was an air of mature solemnity and gravity in her by no means plain countenance which made her look older than her years.

Before her on the table were an account book, pamphlets, and formidable-looking papers, and she held a pen in her hand.

She looked up as Dane entered, and greeted him with a grave smile—not a blush, and he noted it—and made an entry in the account book before she rose, and said, by way of welcome:

“Is that you, Dane? Good-morning. We are in the middle of a Dorcas committee meeting. Sit down.”

Dane nodded to the parsons and the lady, and, with a suppressed groan, sunk into a chair.

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## CHAPTER XI.

DANE sat down and looked at the Dorcas committee with the expression on his handsome face which a man wears when he finds himself in company which he doesn’t like, and which, he knows, doesn’t like him, and both he and the company have to try and look pleasant.

The lady in the widow’s weeds smiled at him severely, one of the clergymen smiled at him vacantly, the third eyed him with a grim kind of disfavor. There is no need to describe the first, the vicar; the third was a thin, rather lantern-jawed young man, with a big nose and thin lips, and remarkably intellectual eyes. His name was Martin Fanshawe. The Rev-

erend Martin Fanshawe was the curate of the parish in which Castle Towers stood. He was a good young man, but rather hard and exacting, as a man must necessarily become who, being "good" himself, burns with a desire to make his fellow-creatures good also. He was a great favorite of Lady Theodosia Hainault, who regarded him as a type of all the Christian—and several of the heathen—virtues; and she and he, to put it vulgarly, "ran" the parish, the vicar being a dear, sleepy, easy-going old man who left things generally to his curate, and was quite content as long as he himself was not worried. So the Reverend Martin, being an energetic young man, threw himself into his work, and made things in Torchester, which was the name of the parish, "hum" as the Americans say.

He started temperance societies, bands of hope, Dorcas meetings, savings banks, workmen's clubs, penny readings, and all the other means by which the village laborer is wooed from the public-house and made "good," whether he likes it or not.

And Lady Theodosia Hainault, the young lady with the thoughtful eyes and grave mien, helped him with all her heart and soul, and with her purse.

She was the daughter of a well-known peer who had married an enormously wealthy woman, and all her mother's money had come to Lady Theodosia, together with Castle Towers, one of the finest "seats" in England.

Her father, Lord Hainault, had been a great friend of Dane's father, and the two men had arranged that their children should become husband and wife; so that Lady Theodosia and Lord Dane had been, so to speak, betrothed in their cradles. They had been playfellows together, and as Starminster Hall and Castle Towers were at no great distance from each other, were seldom apart. The girl, always a quiet, solemn little thing, had grown up to regard the wild, harum-scarum boy as her husband, and Dane had always considered himself "booked" to his cousin Theodosia.

To bind the tie still closer, Lord Hainault made a will by which a certain sum of money—a very large sum even for these "millionaire" times—should go to the young people if they married, and go away from them to the heir to the title—a cousin—in the event of their breaking off the match.

Naturally, Lord Starminster was exceedingly anxious that the match should not be broken off, but that the matrimonial arrangement should be carried through; and it was not only monetary considerations which made him anxious that his son



should marry Lady Theodosia. Dane was rather, well, "wild" and restless; Theodosia was grave, serene, "good;" therefore she would make a very suitable wife, be a fine restraining influence on Dane, and keep him straight.

And the young people were fond of each other; there could be no doubt of that. They always got on well together. Dane used to confide in Theodosia, confessed his scrapes—some of them—to her, took her advice, and her sermons and lectures, patiently and in good part.

They seldom quarreled; but when they did, Dane was always the first to own up and make friends; for he was a good-natured, easy-going modest young fellow, and had sense enough to see that the little girl with the grave face and dark eyes had twice as many brains as he, and was twice as good.

And until he met Lyra Chester he had been quite satisfied with his matrimonial prospects, had looked forward to marrying Theodosia—some day—with easy serenity, and had never asked himself what love meant. Now all things had become changed in his mind and his heart. He had learned what love meant, and the knowledge—like most knowledge, by the way—had brought him much misery.

He sat and looked round at the solemn conclave, and wondered how he could get away. A few days ago he would have jumped up, and said:

"See you presently, Dosie," and cut and run; but he couldn't do it to-day, he felt too penitent and full of remorse.

"Thirty-six yards of Welsh flannel, at a shilling and five-pence farthing, would come to—to—"

There was a pause, and Theodosia looked absently at Dane as she tried to make the mental calculation.

"No use looking in this direction," he said, shaking his head. "Haven't the least idea; couldn't tell you to save my life."

Theodosia smiled indulgently; but the Reverend Martin Fanshawe frowned as if in rebuke at such levity.

"Two pounds eleven and ninepence," he said, gravely.

"Thank you, Mr. Fanshawe," with gentle gratitude. "Two pounds eleven and ninepence. Now, let us see; how many members are there? Twenty-eight; and they subscribe twopence a week. How many—how long would it be before they made up the amount?"

There was a pause, which Dane very injudiciously filled in by remarking:

"About a hundred years, I should think."

They all looked solemnly, reprovngly at him, and Lady Theodosia colored slightly.

"My dear Dane, I'm afraid you don't understand the importance of this work. We are endeavoring, under Mr. Fanshawe's guidance, to establish a Dorcas society, with the object of supplying the poor with warm winter garments."

"I see," said Dane, cheerfully; "and you want to buy the flannel. All right. Let me help. I shall be delighted. I'll give the two pounds eleven and tenpence—no, ninepence, wasn't it?"

The lady in the weeds groaned, the vicar smiled pitingly, Martin Fanshawe sighed with an air of long sufferance.

"Oh, no! no, thank you," said Lady Theodosia. "Don't you understand, my dear Dane, that we want the society to be *self-supporting*. We do not wish to pauperize them. We want to guard against that most carefully. It is very kind of you to take so much interest and be so generous—"

"Oh, come!" said Dane.

—"But we can not make a charity of it; it must be self-supporting."

"All right," said Dane, cheerfully and with a glimmer of common sense, "then you must raise the subscriptions or give 'em less or cheaper flannel."

Mr. Fanshawe rose with a slight frown.

"I think we had better adjourn the meeting, Lady Theodosia," he said, in his grave, clerical voice.

"Here! I'll clear out," said Dane, rising with suspicious alacrity. "I'm in the way."

"Oh, not at all!" murmured Mr. Fanshawe, in rather a shocked voice. "We have taken up a great deal of Lady Theodosia's time already, and—er—we can meet again later on."

They gathered up their papers, and made their adieus—Martin Fanshawe bending over Lady Theodosia's hand with a reverential gesture—and, as Dane would have put it, "cleared out;" and he and Theodosia were left alone.

"I didn't know you were engaged, Dosie," he said, "or I wouldn't have come in. Why didn't you let me take myself off. I'm like a bull in a crockery shop."

She shut up her account book, and smiled up at him gently, indulgently, as a mother smiles at a good-hearted but rather spoiled child.

"Oh, no, Dane! Besides, you might have helped us."

"Well, I tried to," said Dane.

She shook her head.

"In the wrong way, I'm afraid, Dane. But you are not expected to understand this kind of thing."

"No; it's rather out of my line," admitted Dane; "though, after all, it still seems to me that it must be easier to give 'em the flannel petticoats, or whatever they are, and say no more about it."

"Easier? Ah, yes! but if we always did that which was the easiest in this life—"

"We should all be much jollier," he put in, like the heathen he was. "But never mind. You haven't told me how you are, Dosie."

"You haven't asked me yet," she said, with a smile. "I am very well; but your father is not at all well. He has a bad attack of the gout in his hand, as I told you, and he wants to see you. That is why I wrote."

"Yes," he said, with a nod; "and I came."

"Yes," she said—she didn't throw her arms round his neck and murmur: "I am so glad you have come, dear Dane!"—"yes; he caught it at a meeting up in the north. He had to stand on a draughty platform for three hours."

"I see," said Dane. "Why on earth does he do such mad things?"

She reproachfully raised her dark eyes to his.

"Your father does his duty at all costs, Dane."

"I know," he said, rather wearily.

"But where have you been?" she asked, looking up at him from the depth of a great chair which seemed to swallow her.

He was leaning against the mantel-shelf with his hands thrust into his jacket pockets.

"Oh, here, there, and everywhere; going up and down like a roaring lion—"

"Dane!" she murmured, reprovingly.

"Eh? Oh, beg pardon! Oh, I've been all over the shop."

"You are not looking well," she remarked. "Have you been traveling a great deal?"

A faint color tinged his face, and he kept his eyes on the carpet.

"Well—yes, I've had a longish spell in the train, and I'm rather tired."

"And have you not been home? Why did you not go there first?" she asked, quite calmly.

Dane looked at her. He could scarcely say: "A guilty conscience drove me here."

"Oh, I'll go there now," he said. "I thought, perhaps, you'd be glad to see me," he added, thinking, as he spoke, of



yesterday in the valley, of the lovely, passion-lit face of Lyra Chester, and not unnaturally drawing a comparison between her and this cold little saint.

"Of course I am glad to see you," she said, in even tones. "And you must stay to lunch. It is just ready. You did not tell me where you have been."

"Didn't I?" he said, turning away and examining one of the bronzes on the mantel-shelf, as if he had not known it since boyhood. "Oh, I've been fishing and tramping about. There's nothing to tell."

"Oh, Dane, Dane!"

"I'd better go and wash a few pounds of the dust off me," he remarked. "It's a good many hours since I saw soap and water last. I won't be long."

He went up the broad staircase with rather a dragging step very unlike his usual one, and got a good wash, and then came down to the meal which had been served in the spacious dining-room, which, because it was of less size than the great banquet-room, was called "the small parlor."

Lady Theodosia's companion was present—a lady just past middle age—a very pleasant woman of the world who was very much attached to Theodosia and a great friend of Dane. She always stood up for him when Theodosia alluded to his idle restlessness, and declared that Lord Dane, like a good many other persons, was not so bad as he was painted. It may be added that Mrs. Leslie was not particularly fond of parsons.

"How do you do, Lord Dane?" she said, as she gave him her hand. "You have come to see us at last. Theodosia insisted that you had gone to Africa. Everybody goes to Africa now, you know."

"I know," he said. "England will soon relapse into barbarism, I suppose, and civilized people will be coming from Africa presently, just to see our ruins and shoot our wild beasts."

"The accounts of the mission work in Africa are very interesting," remarked Lady Theodosia. "But I suppose you do not read them, Dane."

"I'm afraid I don't," he said. "Let me carve that fowl for you, Mrs. Leslie. Missionary work isn't much in my line. By the way, they might send over half a dozen missionaries from Africa to look up our heathen in the slums of London. That isn't a bad idea, eh, Dosie? Afraid it isn't original, though."

Theodosia was about to retort in her gravely mild way, when Mrs. Leslie gently stopped the fight.

"Oh, don't you two begin to argue about missionaries and the rest of it, until after lunch and I've got out of the way! Argument is bad for the digestion—and temper."

"All right," said Dane. "I didn't begin it, please, mum."

"Tell us some news," said Mrs. Leslie. "Theodosia says you have been fishing. Have you had good sport?"

Dane vigorously helped himself to another slice of ham.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "fairly good. As to news, I expected to hear it from you. I don't often read the papers, excepting *The Field*, you know."

Lady Theodosia sighed.

"How do you keep your mind cultivated?" she asked.

"I don't cultivate it," he rejoined, cheerfully. "Rather think I haven't any mind to cultivate. Can't help it. It isn't my fault, as the boy said when they asked him why he squinted."

"No, Dane; that is not true," said his betrothed, sweetly. "I can not let that plea pass. We all of us are responsible for our mental condition—all excepting those of us who are insane."

"Put me down among the idiots, then," he responded, with unabated cheerfulness. "It's no use, Dosie; I never had any brains. You can't gather grapes from thistles."

"Thistles are not bad things in their way," remarked Mrs. Leslie, with a faint smile. "Some people like them."

"Yes—donkeys," said Dane, laughing.

"Thanks—oh, thanks!" murmured Mrs. Leslie, with a laugh.

Theodosia looked on at this sally with grave eyes.

"Why do you encourage him?" she asked, with gentle reproach.

"My dear, Lord Dane doesn't need any encouragement," retorted Mrs. Leslie, blandly.

Dane leaned back and laughed. He could enjoy an epigram, though he wasn't clever enough to make one.

"No," she said. "But don't you think, dear, you do encourage him; that it would be better, more honest, to try and open his eyes to his faults, and help him to a higher and more useful life than the one he is leading?"

Mrs. Leslie suppressed a smile.

"Perhaps it would be," she said. "Suppose we begin at once. What shall we take first?"

"Couldn't you open my eyes, as you call it, after we've finished, and I'm having a smoke on the terrace?" asked Dane. "Besides, how do you know they are not open?"

Lady Theodosia shook her head.

"No, Dane, I can not believe that you realize the responsibilities of your position, that you realize the sin of a useless, misdirected life, of the wasted golden hours which are intrusted to us for self-improvement, and for labor for our fellow-men."

Dane leaned back in his chair and seemed to be listening respectfully; but as he gazed out of the window at the beautiful lawns and far-spreading meadows beyond, all of which would be his some day, when he married the present pretty and pious owner, his thoughts strayed. He saw the Taw valley, he heard the babble of the stream, he saw the slim, girlish figure, the rapt, absorbed face of Lyra Chester, as she stood with poised fishing-rod.

"You might do so much, and I fear—indeed, I know, dear Dane, that you do so little," the fair preacher went on, in the soft, gently chiding voice. "You are blessed with health, and strength, and position, all advantages which you should use in the service of those of your brothers who have not been so richly endowed."

He saw Lyra Chester turn to him just at that moment, *felt* her eyes meet his, with the glow of innocent joy in them.

"Can you tell me of one really useful thing you have done, one good object you have accomplished during the time you have been absent? Can you recall one, dear Dane?"

He was silent.

"No. It is, I fear, an unbroken record of—forgive me—selfish amusement. Fishing is not the sole end and aim of life, Dane."

"No. There's hunting and shooting," he said, absently.

Lady Theodosia colored, and looked like a sweet little bird whose feathers had been suddenly ruffled; but Mrs. Leslie laughed.

"What is the use of preaching at him, my dear," she said.

"He has been thinking of something else while you have been sermonizing. Now confess you were?" and she turned on Dane.

Dane started slightly and flushed.

"I beg your pardon, Dosie," he said, penitently. "I—I'm afraid I didn't pay the closest attention. Now, look here; I'll own up to all you've accused me of—what *did* you charge me with—manslaughter, burglary, what?—and I hope your worship will give me the option of a fine. It's true that I am a lazy, worthless kind of a wretch, and spend my time smoking cigars—when I'm not on pipes—but I'll promise to reform. I offered to take the pledge, if you remember, some time ago,



and you only sighed. I'll do anything you like—except deliver tracts, or collect for the missionaries—so lay your commands upon your humble slave right away."

Lady Theodosia sighed.

"You can not be serious, Dane, dear," she said. "If you can not find work to your hand, I can not point it out to you."

"There you are, you see!" he exclaimed, with mild triumph. "I'm too utterly useless for anything. I told you so!"

"No, Dane, dear," she rejoined, sweetly. "No one can put in that plea. All of us can find some work suited to us. Take, for instance, Chandos."

Dane made a grimace.

"I'd rather take castor oil," he murmured. Mrs. Leslie laughed.

Lady Theodosia, glancing at her reproachfully, went on:

"Chandos even works. It is true that one can not always approve of—all he writes. There is something besides love in this world."

"There's taxes," murmured Dane, irreverently.

"But Chandos, when he was down here, took a great interest in our parish work, and has promised to write a volume of ballads for our bazaar in the autumn."

"That's all right," said Dane, cheerfully, wondering, as he spoke, what Lady Theodosia would think of the exquisite Chandos if she knew as much of that gentleman's ways as he, Dane, knew. "That's very kind of him; but I can't write a volume of ballads. But I tell you what, I'll give you a ten-pound note—a genuine one, not of my own make—for your bazaar."

"I do not want your money, Dane," said Lady Theodosia, rather ungratefully.

"I see; it's my life you want," he rejoined.

Lady Theodosia colored, and rose with dignity.

"Dane!"

"Eh? What have I said now?" he demanded.

Lady Theodosia bent another reproachful glance at him, and, with a sigh, left the room.

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## CHAPTER XII.

"WHY do you tease her so?" asked Mrs. Leslie.

"That's strange! I thought I was the one who was being teased," said Dane.

Mrs. Leslie laughed, but rather ruefully.

"She is very fond of you, Dane," she said.

"Is she?" he rejoined, penitently and rather doubtfully.

"Yes, yes; it is because of her fondness for you that she—"

"Lectures me, wants to make me better," he said. "Dodie is too good for me, I know that," he added, with self-reproach.

Mrs. Leslie looked at him earnestly.

"I wish, for both your sakes, that you would try and get on better. Why do you not come to see us oftener, Lord Dane?"

He looked down; he felt as if her keen, womanly eyes were reading his heart and learning its secret.

"You should not stay away so long. Theodosia is surrounded by—by adverse influence, by person—persons," she corrected herself, "who make it their business to keep her reminded of your—"

"Crimes."

"Shortcomings. Lord Dane, Theodosia is a sweet-natured, warm-hearted girl, and her only fault is—"

He waited.

"That she is too good," she added, with a burst of candor.

"But she will improve in time."

"With my aid, eh?" said Dane, smiling, but rather ruefully. "All right; I won't tease her any more if I can help it. But look here, Mrs. Leslie, you are a friend of both of us—"

"I am that, certainly, Lord Dane."

"Well, do you think"—he hesitated—"do you think Dodie would be happier, more—content, if—if she were free?"

Mrs. Leslie shook her head.

"No, no," she responded; "you must not think of that. No, no. Be patient, be—well, more 'good,' and wait until she is a little bad. Ah, no, Lord Dane, you and she are pledged; you can not draw back."

Dane went on to the terrace and smoked his cigar. When he had hinted to Mrs. Leslie of a rupture of the engagement, his heart had stirred with a sudden wild hope; but her words had dispelled that hope. He smoked his cigar and went back into the house, and spent some further time with his affianced, during which, by careful self-restraint, he managed to avoid another passage of arms, then started for Starminster.

He reached Starminster in the gloaming. Every one knows the place from the engraving in the illustrated papers. It is a huge building, standing in a park noble in extent and rich in forest-trees. It had been the home of the Starminsters for centuries, and a great deal of history had been made within its irregular walls. Dane was fond of it, proud of it in a way;

but as he looked up at its crooked front, which generations of his line had added to, he wished in his heart that he had been born a mere nobody, free to do as he pleased, free to—yes, to tell Lyra Chester that he loved her, and make her his sweet, dear wife.

He flung his cigar away as he entered the hall—the earl did not like tobacco—and was met by the stately butler, who had been in the family since he was a boy, working his way up from “buttons” to footman, and thence to the lofty position he at present filled.

“How are you, Brownley?” said Dane, in his genial, kindly fashion.

“Thank you, my lord, quite well, and I hope your lordship’s the same,” replied Mr. Brownley, with the mixture of affection and respect which distinguishes the “old retainer.” “The earl’s been expecting you, my lord. His lordship has got a bad attack of the gout, and ought to be in bed; but he won’t go. He’s in the library, my lord.”

“All right; I’ll go to him,” said Dane.

He passed through the hall—the famous hall, which has been painted and engraved so often that it has almost become public property—and knocked at the library door.

A thin and rather squeaky voice answered, “Come in,” and Dane entered.

Though it was not yet dark, there was a shaded lamp on the large writing-table, and its light fell upon a thin, careworn, and—must it be said?—rather querulous face. It was lined with wrinkles that clustered in a thick group round the tired-looking eyes.

“How are you, sir?” said Dane.

The earl looked up from a sheet of paper over which he was bending.

“Is that you, Dane? Shut the door, will you? The draught simply kills me. Sit down. Where have you been?”

Dane sat down. How many more times was he to be asked that question—the question he dared not answer?

“Wandering about, as usual, sir,” he replied.

The earl pushed the paper from him with restless impatience, and leaning back, surveyed his stalwart, handsome son with a troubled gaze.

“Isn’t it almost time you ceased wandering?” he asked. “I ask the question for your own good. You will be master here soon—”

“I hope not, sir,” put in Dane, honestly, affectionately. “I am sorry you are bad again.”



"I'm nearly always bad now," put in the earl, impatiently. "I've got the gout in my hand—in my right hand—so that I can't write. It's a terrible nuisance—and just at this crisis, too. I suppose you know that a general election is likely?"

"I—I'm afraid I don't," said Dane. "I don't study politics much, you know, sir."

The earl groaned.

"I suppose not," he said, resignedly. "I wish to Heaven you did. Dane, no young man ever had a better opportunity to distinguish himself than you have."

"Yes, sir," said Dane, rather absently—here in the lamp-light, as in the sunlight at Castle Towers, the tormenting vision of Lyra Chester rose before him.

"I have made a place for you," went on the earl, "a place into which, with a little thought and labor, you could easily step."

Dane shook his head.

"No use, father," he said, regretfully, affectionately. "You can't give me your brains, you know. For Heaven's sake, don't build your hopes upon my following in your footsteps. I'm no good."

The earl sighed and passed his ungouty hand over his weary forehead. Not only was his brain weary, but his heart and soul, and why he should desire that his son should inherit his weariness Heaven, and Heaven only, knows. But he did desire it most fervently.

"Well, well," he said, with a sigh, "we are as God made us;" and his tone almost implied that this straight, handsome son of his was an idiot. "But, Dane, I am glad you have come. I wanted to speak to you."

"Yes, father," said Dane, with the tenderness which the strong-minded, firm-nerved man feels for the weak-minded, weak-nerved. "What is it?"

"I want to speak to you about Theodosia and your engagement."

Dane started slightly and looked down.

"Yes?"

"Yes. Dane, I fear you don't realize your position, the responsibilities." Poor Dane had heard the word "responsibilities" a great many times that day, and he winced. "You don't realize that your engagement to Theodosia is a solemn, a very solemn undertaking."

"I think I do, sir," said Dane, in a low voice.

"You do? I am glad of it," said the earl. "I am devoutly glad of it. I feared that of late you had grown—well,

yes—careless, Dane. I don't want to inquire into your mode of life or your doings. I know a young man permits himself a certain amount of latitude; but I know that you are—well, rather wild and reckless.”

“Oh,” said Dane, “whom did you hear that from, sir.”

The earl shuffled uneasily in his chair.

“Er—er—” he replied, hesitatingly—“I heard it—Chandos—”

Dane did not start up from his chair, but his brows darkened.

“I see, sir,” he said, in a dry voice. “Well, Chandos ought to know.”

“Chandos— Don't be angry, Dane. I can not endure much excitement.”

“I am not angry,” said Dane, calmly; and indeed his scorn and contempt smothered his anger.

“Chandos let fall a hint or two. I don't blame you, Dane. Please understand that. If I mention the matter at all, it is because I want to impress upon you my conviction that your best chance of happiness lies in marrying Theodosia, and—and that before long. Dane, I don't ask any questions, I don't want you to confide in me; all I wish to do is to remind you that I am an old man, that you will soon be standing in my place, and that it is only natural that I should desire to see you settled in life before I depart hence and am no more.”

There was a touch of dignified pathos in the old earl's voice which went straight to Dane's heart.

He rose and went round to him, and laid his hand on the shoulder bent with the cares of state.

“What is it you want me to say and do, father?” he asked. The earl looked up at him with loving, earnest eyes.

“I hoped to see you married to Theodosia, Dane,” he said, in a low, grave voice. He must have seen the grave melancholy, the wistful sadness in Dane's eyes; for he went on earnestly, imploringly: “Dane, you are not thinking of—of drawing back? It can not be! You have pledged your word. You can not draw back. None of our names has ever been false to his word, his plighted oath! Dane! Dane!”—for Dane's face had gone white—“what does this mean? Stop! If you are going to tell me that you are going to break your word, violate your oath, don't do so! I—I could not bear it! You have been pledged to marry Theodosia from your boyhood; the engagement has stood until now. It can not—*can not*—do you hear?—be broken! Dane, if you were false to your word, if you—you played the traitor in this matter, you

would literally bring my gray hairs in sorrow to a dishonored grave!"

Though the vision of Lyra Chester rose before him at the moment, though his heart ached with love for her, though he would have given the world to be able to claim her for his wife, what could Dane, Lord Armitage, say but this:

"Father"—and his voice sounded hoarsely in the quiet room—"you need not fear. No Armitage ever broke his word. I shall marry Theodosia!"

"Thank God, my boy—thank God!" murmured the old man.

And so the chains were drawn more tightly round Dane, and as they were being thus drawn, a spider was weaving a web round Lyra Chester, the girl whom Dane loved—a spider not ugly and repulsive in form, but sleek and exquisite—a very cunning spider, whose name was Chandos, *alias* Geoffrey Barle!

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## CHAPTER XIII.

THE Honorable Chandos Armitage, *alias* Geoffrey Barle, found himself in extremely cozy quarters, and, as his sprain did not hurt him very much—though he made as much of it as he could, be sure—he was extremely comfortable.

The spare room at the cottage was small and plainly furnished; but there was, notwithstanding, a daintiness about it which gratified Mr. Chandos's refined, esthetic taste. The curtains were of prettily flowered dimity; there was a great bunch of sweetly smelling flowers on the table beside the bed, and the diamond-framed windows overlooked the Taw.

It was much more comfortable and home-like than a room at a hotel, and Mr. Chandos congratulated himself upon his refusal to be removed.

Here he lay for three days, quite the interesting invalid to Mary, who waited upon him with all the zest which attends a novel duty.

"He do look such a gentleman, and he have got such a soft, pleasant voice, for all the world like a woman," she remarked to Griffith, who growled and snarled something under his breath in response.

To say that Mr. Chandos was curious about his host and his beautiful daughter, would be an altogether inadequate description of his state of mind. He had never seen any one so beautiful—"so altogether lovely," as he would have put it—



as Lyra in all his life, and in an artful way he got as much information respecting her from Mary as he could.

There did not seem much to tell, for Mary had not been in the Chesters' service long, and knew nothing of their history previous to her coming to the cottage, and, strange to say, she did not mention Lord Dane's visit, perhaps because Mr. Chandos, not being aware of it, did not ask any questions.

"And Miss Lyra lives all alone here with her father and sees no one?" he said. "It is a very sad life, a very dull existence, Mary, and I must see when I get up if I can not brighten it a little. Does—ahem!—does your young mistress ever mention me, Mary?" he asked, with affected carelessness.

"She always asks every morning how you be, sir," she replied; "but she don't say naught beside. I'm afraid Miss Lyra bean't very well; she's so mortal pale-looking, and so quiet like. Why, Lor', she's quite different these last three days, so quiet and sad like; she as used to be singing all day long, and romping with Carlo and the cats, and always on the move; she don't seem to care to do nothing but sit in the garden with her book, and she don't read, neither, for I've seen it lying turned down on her lap for hours; me nor Griffith can't think what ails her. If the master were like any other father—which he bean't—he'd send for the doctor for to her. Griffith's mortal cut up about it, but he won't let me speak to her, and gets into one of his tantrums—and Griffith bean't pleasant in his tantrums—if I says she ought to have a doctor."

Mr. Chandos felt a pleasant sensation about what he called his heart. Was it possible that his charms had already commenced to work havoc in the beautiful's girl's bosom? Was it possible that she was already smitten by Love's dart?

It seemed more than possible to Mr. Chandos; indeed, exceedingly probable.

What a delightful romance it might prove, he thought, as he lay gazing out of the window with his pale-blue eyes, quite a too charming episode in his life if he could win the love of this simple maiden! What a happy idea it was, his giving a false name. He could amuse himself with this romance as "Geoffrey Barle," and—well, when tired, could ride away, like the lover in the poem, and leave no traces behind.

He whiled away the time thinking of Lyra's beautiful face, and composing sonnets and lyrics to her—sweet, passionate verses which were echoes of the originals he had read but which it was not likely such an unsophisticated girl as Lyra would know anything about.

On the afternoon of the third day he sent into Barnstaple

for a guitar, and set some of these verses to a tinkling melody which, when it penetrated to the sitting-room where Mr. Chester sat reading, made that absent-minded gentleman stare round him with bewilderment.

"It's only the gentleman upstairs playing on the banjo," explained Mary—to whom a banjo and a guitar were one and the same—"and he do play it lovely."

Mr. Chester groaned.

"Oh!" he said, vacantly, "I suppose he is quite well now;" then mentally he added: "and able to go." But when Mr. Geoffrey Barle came down-stairs in the afternoon of the next day, leaning heavily on Mary, and looking sweetly interesting, he, Mr. Geoffrey, did not hint at taking his departure.

"I hope you are better," said Mr. Chester, blinking at him as he sunk back carefully and with a soft moan into the easiest chair.

"Thank you very much," murmured Chandos. "I am better, but I fear—I fear I am not strong enough to relieve your hospitality. I can not express my gratitude to you for your great, your tender care of me. But for your kindness I might"—he shuddered—"have been a cripple for life."

"I don't think a sprain generally has such serious results," remarked Mr. Chester, in his dry, preoccupied manner.

"Not usually, perhaps," assented Mr. Chandos, blandly. "But I am—er—peculiarly delicate and—er—susceptible to injury, and— But I don't see your daughter, Mr. Chester. I am anxious, devoured with anxiety, to express my gratitude to her."

"Lyra is in the garden," said Mr. Chester, still more absently, his eyes wandering wistfully to his book.

Mr. Chandos got up with surprising ease.

"I'll go to her if you will permit me," he said; then he suddenly remembered that he was lame. "That is, if you will allow your servant to assist me?"

Mr. Chester rang the bell, and leaning on Mary's arm, and with his sweetest, most "fetching" expression on his face, Mr. Chandos limped as gracefully as possible into the garden.

Lyra was leaning on the gate, looking over the river, her head resting on her hand, and as she turned at the sound of footsteps, Mr. Chandos was struck by the alteration in her appearance. She was very pale, but it was not only her pallor which started him. There was a look in her eyes which was eloquent of suffering and sorrow, of the strain caused by a mental struggle and battle. She looked as one looks when the

canker worm of a secret sorrow is eating into the bud of life's happiness.

But this only made her more interesting in the eyes of Mr. Chandos, especially as he was convinced that he was the cause of her unhappiness. He expected to see her blush as she turned and saw him, and was rather disappointed that she did not, but regarded him with the steady gaze of her sad, dark eyes.

"I hasten to lay the tribute of my gratitude at your feet, Miss Chester," he began, in his "highfalutin," affected style; but Lyra's brows grew straight, and he was sharp enough to see that he was taking the wrong line. "As I have just told Mr. Chester, I can not express my sense of your great goodness to me," he said, in a more natural and respectful tone. "An invalid, even when he or she is a member of the family, is always a burden, but must be doubly so, when, like myself, he is a stranger. You have played the part of the Good Samaritan, Miss Chester, with a perfection which has rendered me eternally your debtor. I am, of course, very anxious to relieve you of the burden, but I am not what is called a strong man; I do not mean," he made haste to add, "that I am weak or—or—puny; but I am of highly strung and extremely sensitive nerves, and—er—I feel I shall have to trespass upon your Arabian hospitality a little longer."

"My father will be very glad if you will stay," said Lyra; and, as she spoke, Mr. Chandos noticed that her voice was low and subdued, and that she uttered the sentence mechanically. "Will you not sit down?" and she moved toward the rustic seat.

With Mary's assistance the invalid got himself seated, and striking an esthetic attitude, gazed up at Lyra, who stood, with the climbing roses for background, pale and dreamy-eyed.

"You have a most delightful, most picturesque home, Miss Chester," he murmured, with the flute stop on. "It is an Arcadia—a sweet haven of rest and repose. But, tell me, do you never weary of it? Do you never, like an imprisoned bird, sigh for liberty, for change, for—er—life?"

Lyra looked down at him as if she had brought her thoughts back to him from a long distance.

"Do I? Am I never weary, dull?" she said, as if she were asking the question of herself.

A few days ago, before the advent of Lord Dane, she would have replied with a laughing negative; now her brows came together, and there came no laugh or smile to her lips. She looked round and sighed. Never until that moment had she



thought of weariness or *ennui*, never felt dull or lonely. But now— Yes, he was right. She felt like a bird bruised and sore with vain and futile beatings against the walls of its cage.

“Ah! I see you do,” murmured Mr. Chandos. “Believe me that this life of yours—if you can call it life; it is really but existence—is not worthy of you. You were born to shine a star in brighter, happier spheres.” Lyra looked at him with grave inquiry—perhaps she still thought him a little mad—and Mr. Chandos’s pale-blue eyes fell before the sad, innocent orbs. “Do not think I flatter,” he said, with mock earnestness. “I could not be guilty of flattery to one so—er—so pure and—er—so intelligent as you, Miss Chester. I merely uttered the thought that the sight of your—er—beauty and grace aroused within my mind.”

Lyra ought to have blushed—certainly ought to have looked down and been overcome—but she did neither, rather to Mr. Chandos’s embarrassment.

“You are fond of poetry,” he said, rather than inquired.

Lyra said nothing. But silence, as we know, gives consent, and Mr. Chandos drew a small, elaborately bound volume from his pocket—“‘Soul Throbs,’ by Geoffrey Barle.”

“My own,” he said, almost solemnly, as he held up the volume. “‘Soul Throbs.’ Do you like the title?”

Lyra looked uninterested, much to Mr. Chandos’s disgust.

“Does a soul throb?” she said, listlessly. “Shouldn’t it be ‘Heart Throbs’?”

Mr. Chandos winced.

“Oh, no, no!” he murmured, in quite a shocked voice.

“That would, indeed, be commonplace. Any one, every one, says ‘heart throbs;’ but the soul is a different, a—er—higher, a more esthetic phrase. You feel that, I am sure.”

Lyra neither assented nor dissented, but turned her eyes riverward again.

“May I read you my favorite—one of my favorite—lyrics?” he asked, opening the book.

“It is very kind of you,” said Lyra, but without the enthusiasm which Mr. Chandos certainly considered proper, if not obligatory.

He cleared his throat, and with half-closed eyes which watched her, he commenced:

“No linnet I, to sing on topmost bough,  
No lark to soar to heaven’s gate;  
But if I sing my best, wilt thou  
Sing sweetly to me, oh! my mate?”

It is to be feared that only the last word caught Lyra’s at-

tention, for when he paused and looked up at her inquiringly, she said, with a little confusion, for she did not want to wound him:

"It is a sea-song. The Devonshire people are very fond of them, and sing them all along the river—"

She saw by the horrified expression of his washed-out eyes that she had made a mistake, and waited.

"A sea-song!" he exclaimed.

"There—there, was something about a mate, wasn't there?" said Lyra, eager to soothe him.

Mr. Chandos went pale with mortification.

"Oh, no, no!" he murmured, reproachfully. "The mate alluded to was a—a—companion, a—er—kindred soul."

"I beg your pardon," said Lyra. "It—it was very stupid of me. But will you not read some more? I will try and understand them."

The apology was almost worse than the offense, in Mr. Chandos's eyes; but he stifled his disgust and disappointment, and read another choice extract. Lyra sat down and seemed to listen, her hands clasped, her lovely profile turned to him. If she had sat full face to him, he would have seen that he might as well have been reading to a statue.

"It is very pretty," she said, when he had finished.

Mr. Chandos with difficulty suppressed a groan.

"Pretty!" Such a word applied to one of his "Soul Throbs" was an insult. He forgot his lameness and rose, then sunk down, and once more stifled his disappointment.

"Er—pardon me—'pretty' is perhaps scarcely the word to apply to the verses," he said. "But I am sure you appreciate them. Er—while a prisoner in my room, I wrote some new stanzas. I will, if you care to hear them and will allow me to send for my—er—guitar—sing them to you?"

Mary was at the door at the moment, and brought the guitar.

Mr. Chandos struck a suitable attitude, and, his eyes cast up at Lyra with an expression of deep despair, piped away in the thin voice which was so much admired by his female friends. The verses were quite equal in pathos to those he had read. The dealt in the usual "laurel wreath" and "death;" "love" and "dove;" "grave" and "passion's slave;" and, though Lyra did not know it, were really addressed to her.

The performance would have been, if not a success, at any rate a tolerable one, if Lyra had not chanced to glance at the singer when he was fluting out the most impassioned lines.

But she did so chance to glance, and the sight of his upturned eyes, "like to those of a dying duck in a thunder-storm," his sleek head all on one side, like that of a piping bullfinch, and his lackadaisical expression generally, were too much for her.

Wretched as she was, aching though her heart was with the memory of Dane, she could not help laughing. The laugh was one of pain as much as of mirth, and it did not last long. It died away on her lips as suddenly as the effect it produced upon the singer. His face went crimson and then white, his pale-blue eyes grew lighter—not darker—and seemed to glow with rage, and his thin lips were distorted with the passion of wounded vanity and self-conceit.

Lyra was not frightened, but she was startled. He had risen and confronted her, his hands clutching the guitar, his mouth half open.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Forgive me, please forgive me," she said, brokenly. "I can not tell what made me laugh. I am so sorry. Will you"—she tried to say "sing it again," but she dared not, for she knew that heavily though her sudden misery bore upon her, if he sung again she must laugh again or die.

Mr. Chandos seemed to struggle for breath.

"No-o," he gasped at last.

He had never been laughed at—openly—and he was writhing as a man writhes under the lash of a delicate whip, that for all its slightness stings like a scorpion.

"Forgive me," she said again, and she put her hand gently, pleadingly on his arm, and as she did so tears came into her eyes. "I did not mean to do it. It was rude and—yes, cruel to laugh. It was ungrateful, after—after your kindness in taking so much trouble. Will you forgive me, Mr. Barle?"

Chandos's eyes drooped and he sunk down again, both his hands quivering round the neck of the guitar, his thin lips writhing still.

"Yes—y-es," he stammered, as if he were fighting with himself. "There—there is nothing to forgive. I do not suppose," with a tone of dignity which was excruciatingly comical, "I do not imagine for a moment that you were laughing at—at my verses. Something—some passing incident must have caught your attention"—Lyra hung her head—"and you were laughing at that. But I will not sing again. To appreciate these poor little poems of mine, one must be in the mood. Will you take this volume? See, I have ventured to anticipate your gracious acceptance, and have written your name in it. Will you take it and—er—study it in quiet and



seclusion? You may—er—find some thought in harmony with your sweet nature, your scarcely uttered aspirations.”

Lyra rose and took the proffered volume.

“Thank you,” she said, humbly. “It is very kind of you. I—I will send Mary.”

As she left him, Mr. Chandos leaned back and gave vent to the rage that had been choking him—gave vent to a long stream of muttered oaths, hissed out with hot, savage gasps, his face working, his lips twitching.

“You laugh at me, do you?” he stammered. “You laugh, you—you”—he tried “cat,” but even at that moment of ferocious anger, the name struck him as inappropriate to the sweet-faced girl who had just left him—“you insolent plow-girl! Laugh on, but—but only for a time!” He ground his teeth. “If I could only bring the tears to those eyes of yours, if I could only have you cringing at my feet! I will, too!” he hissed out. “Yes”—he swore it with a charmingly original oath—“I will!”

Mary, running in, found her patient on the verge of an apoplectic fit.

“Lawks sakes, sir!” she exclaimed. “Why, what be the matter? You haven’t gone and swallowed soment the wrong way, hev ye?”

Mr. Chandos with some difficulty smoothed his distorted face into something like its usual expression of serene self-conceit, and forced a ghastly smile.

“Er—er—I have had a fit of coughing, my good Mary,” he stammered. “I—er—think I must have taken a chill. Will you kindly lead me back to my room?”

Most men, after such a repulse and humiliation, would have taken their departure; but Mr. Chandos was unlike most men.

He lay on his bed and tossed to and fro, hot one moment and cold the next, as Lyra’s innocent laugh rang in his ears—lay and thought, thought and planned.

It is asserted, by those who ought to know, that it is quite possible for a certain order of beings to love and hate at one and the same moment. If that be so, Mr. Chandos belonged to this peculiar order. One moment his admiration for Lyra, his longing to win her, got possession of him; the next hate, hot and sinister, obtained the mastery. But, predominating above these flashes of love—if you can call it love—and hate, was the burning desire to get her in his power, to see her at his feet, to hear her begging, wailing for mercy, the mercy which he would grant or withhold as suited his humor.

He lay awake for hours, his cunning brain striving after

some means to enable him to gain the desired revenge, and fell asleep at last, dreaming that he was sinking down a deep well, and Lyra was standing at the top laughing down at him.

In the gray dawn he woke, and almost at the moment of waking there flashed into his mind one of those ideas with which the basest of men are sometimes inspired by the devil they serve.

It made him start; it sent the blood rushing to his head; it made him laugh, a laugh which might have found an echo down in the regions of lost souls.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

THE following day Mr. Chandos kept to his own room, sending word to Mr. Chester that he feared he had got up too soon, and felt very much weakened by the effort.

He dispatched Mary to Barnstaple for books and writing and drawing materials, and amused himself by composing some "poems" and making sketches.

The poems were about a "scorned love," and the sketches weak, washy ones of the river. As he sat at the window making these, he saw Lyra go in and out the garden, and his pale-blue eyes watched her from behind the curtain with a peculiar expression, half wistful and longing and half malicious; an expression one sometimes sees in the monkey, and now and again in the tiger.

He noticed that she was pale and sad-looking, and once, as she paced the garden, he heard her sigh.

In the afternoon he saw her go down to the boat, push it into the rising tide, and row to the middle of the river. A sand-bank caught it there, and he watched her as she leaned forward, and, letting her face drop in her hand, seemed lost in a melancholy reverie.

"Can she be fretting after me, after all?" thought Mr. Chandos. "What else can she be brooding over? There can't be any other person or I should have heard of him from Mary."

The thought soothed him considerably, and he continued to watch her until in the evening she slowly rowed the boat homeward.

The following day he came down after lunch and found Lyra just setting out for the boat.

She had almost forgotten him during the preceding day, and she greeted him with a gentle sweetness—for though she had forgotten him she had not forgiven herself for wounding

his feelings. That rejoiced Mr. Chandos who, on his part, was meekness and humility itself. His little bow, his whole manner seemed to say: "You have wounded me to the heart's core, but I forgive you!"

"I hope you are better?" said Lyra, in her low, sweet, and, alas! now sad voice.

"Yes," said Mr. Chandos, plaintively. "I feel much stronger this morning. I am afraid I overdid it yesterday. What a lovely day; you are going out in the boat?" he added, glancing at the oar in her hand, and then at the river flowing like liquid gold in the sunshine.

"Yes," she replied, listlessly. Then it occurred to her that he might like to go. "Would you like to come with me? Are you strong enough?"

"I should like it above all things," responded Mr. Chandos, suppressing his eagerness, "and I am sure the air would do me good."

"Come, then," she said; and, by way of atoning for her cruelty of the day before, she added: "And will you bring your guitar?"

"Shall I?" he asked, looking at her with an humble, dog-like air. "Yes, I will."

Mary helped him down to the boat, and he was ensconced on a cushion in the stern, with another cushion for his wounded leg, and Lyra rowed from shore.

"How exquisitely you row!" he said, after watching her with a longing admiration which he concealed as well as he could under his lowered lids. "It is a graceful and delightful accomplishment."

"I am used to it," said Lyra, absently; for they had reached the spot where Dane had nearly gone down, and she was thinking of him.

"I wish you would teach me, when I recover," said Mr. Chandos, with a little sigh, and strumming on his guitar.

"I will, if you wish it," she said, still absently. "It is not difficult to learn."

"You must be very strong," he said, after a pause. "Would you mind my making a sketch of you while you are rowing? It would make a beautiful picture. I should call it 'Youth at the Oars,' and—perhaps—exhibit it at the Academy."

It was well Mr. Chandos said "perhaps," as there was as much chance of any sketch of his getting into the Academy as of his being wafted to heaven.

"If you like," she said, indifferently.



He took out his sketch-book and made his feeble sketch, talking the while.

"You have never seen the Academy Exhibition?"

She shook her head. She wished that he would not talk; he was bearable while he was silent.

"Ah, what a pity! How I should like to show it to you! You would revel in the pictures, for I know that you have an artist's soul; one sees it in your eyes. There is no place like London; one lives there, but only exists elsewhere. It is in London one finds one's life's work; there is work for all there."

Lyra leaned on her oars and looked at him dreamily, without seeing him. Her heart was filled with an aching desire for something to do; something that should help her to forget Dane—help her to stifle, crush out the misery of her love for him. Here everything reminded her of him—brought him before her mental vision all day long; the garden, the roses, the river—most of all the river—the valley.

"One is wasted in the country," went on Mr. Chandos, speaking carelessly, as if wrapped in his sketch. "Beautiful as it is, it palls on one in time; the human soul needs change. I think you would like London, Miss Lyra; you would find kindred spirits there. Here"—he shrugged his shoulders—"here among farmers and such like persons you are wasted—wasted. London is life. There are concerts, divine music, theaters, the ever-moving, ever-changing crowd; humanity at its best and brightest. You would shine there."

Lyra smiled sadly and faintly. Why was he always harping on this?

"I do not wish to shine. You spoke of work. What work could one so ignorant as I do?"

She asked the question with no definite object; but Mr. Chandos caught the yearning in her voice, the yearning of which she herself was totally unconscious.

"Oh, believe me, there is a great deal you could do," he said, glancing at her, and then bending over his sketch. "You could engage yourself as a governess."

Lyra laughed.

"In all London there would not be one more ignorant," she said, half to herself.

"Believe me, you do yourself an injustice," he rejoined. "I have seen in the sitting-room the books you have read: you speak—forgive me—with the truest refinement; you would have no difficulty in getting a situation. But if you do not care for teaching you could learn to paint, to sing—"

Lyra looked at him with mild incredulity.

"Or," he went on, "there are hundreds of persons—old and middle-aged ladies who are alone in the world—who would be only too grateful to have you for a companion."

"A companion?" said Lyra.

"Yes; to write their letters, to read to them, to bestow upon them the invaluable, the priceless boon of your society and sympathy. Believe me, Miss Lyra, you were not meant to live alone in this solitary, desolate place. You should go to London, the great city that throbs with life and—er—the joy of living."

Lyra looked at him.

"I am not alone," she said, with faint surprise. "I have my father; you forget."

Mr. Chandos coughed.

"Ah, yes! I forgot," he murmured. "But surely he loves you too well, he is not so selfish as to desire to sacrifice your young, your beautiful life, your many gifts—" He stopped, for he saw by the expression of her face, as she bent to the oars again, that she had ceased to listen to him.

They rowed down the river against the tide, and Mr. Chandos, having finished his sketch, held it away from him, and surveyed it with his head one side, waiting for her to ask to see it; but as she did not do so, indeed, appeared to have forgotten it, he said, rather plaintively:

"Do you not wish to see my poor attempt to portray you, Miss Lyra?"

"I beg your pardon," she said, apologetically; and she took the sketch.

Mr. Chandos possessed some little skill, and he had not sketched her very badly; indeed, he had contrived to flatter her by some extraordinary fluke.

Lyra smiled.

"Why do you smile?" he murmured, reproachfully. "Am I doomed always to provoke your laughter?"

"Oh, no, no!" said Lyra. "I smiled because"—she paused, then said with listless frankness—"it is too good for me."

"No, no," he said, with genuine eagerness. "It is not, it is *not*. No one could do you justice. Ah, do you not know—have you no mirror to tell you how beautiful you are?"

Lyra flushed to the brow, and laid the sketch down with a quiet dignity which made Mr. Chandos wince.

"I—I beg your pardon," he said, humbly; "but—but it is the truth."

Lyra looked over his head, the flush faded, her face pale again, and rowed on in silence, Mr. Chandos hanging his head like a scolded school-boy.

The boat drifted near the shore, and, looking up, he saw some ruins in the shape of a church standing amidst some trees.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing to them.

"That is an old church, St. Mark's," she murmured.

"How beautiful, how interesting," he murmured.

"Would you like to see it?" she asked. "We can land here, and it is only a few steps from the shore."

"I fear that I can not traverse even a few steps without assistance, and I could not trouble you," he said, wistfully.

She put the boat's nose shoreward.

"I will help you," she said, sweetly.

She drew the boat on to the beach and helped him out, and gave him her arm; the color crept into Mr. Chandos's face, and his eyes dropped as he took it, and his sordid little heart beat.

All unconscious of the effect she produced on him, Lyra led him into the ruined church, and he looked round.

"It would make a charming picture," he murmured. "I should call it, 'I Once Have Been.' It would create a sensation in London."

A portion of the church was still in fairly good preservation, and it was shut off from the rest of the ruins by a door of rough planking.

"Why, what is this?" he asked, stopping before it.

"It is a portion of the church that has been kept up," said Lyra. "Service is held here sometimes. It is for the fishermen at Peterel, and they come over in their boats to it when the roads are too bad for them to get to Barnstaple. Would you like to see the inside?"

Mr. Chandos admitted that he should, and Lyra thrust her hand among the ivy growing thickly about the extemporized door and drew out a key.

"Are you the lady warden?" he asked, with a smile.

"No," she said, simply; "but I know that the key is kept here."

She opened the door as they passed in. Their entrance startled an owl from its day-dreams, and it flew hooting over their heads.

Mr. Chandos looked round with idle curiosity. This remnant of the old church had been made as decent as possible. There was an old weather-beaten communion-table, and some



roughly made pews, and seats with books on them. But the place smelled damp and musty, as all rarely used buildings do.

"And there is service here sometimes?" he said.

"Yes," said Lyra, in a low voice. The quiet serenity, the semi-religious light of the place, soothed her troubled heart.

"Yes; the fisher-folk are often married here, and always bring their children to be christened. They believe that it secures good fortune for the little ones."

Mr. Chandos listened rather absently at first, then his face changed, and he glanced round him and at her sad, preoccupied face.

"They marry here?" he said. "When—when was the last wedding, do you remember?"

Lyra thought for a moment.

"In the spring—this spring," she said. "Shall we go now?"

"Yes," he said. As they passed out he murmured: "I should like to be married there. Should not you, Miss Lyra?"

"I don't know," she said, simply, unconscious of his melting gaze.

As they drifted home with the tide, Mr. Chandos was remarkably silent; and when she helped him out of the boat and up to the house, he only said:

"Thank you very much for all your kindness, your great kindness to me, Miss Lyra."

She went straight to his room and remained there, and he spent some hours neither sketching nor writing, but leaning back in his chair, softly biting at his under lip and staring across the Taw from under his lowered lids. For Mr. Chandos was thinking hard, very hard.

In the gloaming he saw Lyra go down the garden path to the shore; and Mary, entering the room a moment afterward, he remarked, casually:

"Was that Miss Lyra I saw go out just now?"

"Yes, sir; she be gone to Greely's to borrow the paper for master."

"Why didn't you or the man Griffith go?" asked Mr. Chandos, quite as if Lyra were his property.

"Griffith be gone for wood, and I've got to go to Barnstaple," replied Mary. "So I've just come up to bring you the light and ask if there's anything you'll want before I come back?"

"No, no; thank you, my good Mary," said Mr. Chandos, with a sigh. "Er—unless—er—you will be kind enough to bring me a bottle of whisky with you. I think I should like

to rub my foot with it. Whisky's an excellent thing for a sprain."

"All right, sir," said Mary, taking the money. She groaned as she went out, for she was not by any means a fool.

Half an hour later Mr. Chandos heard the garden gate open. He got up—without any difficulty—and went to the window to get a glimpse of the girl who was now never out of his thoughts; but instead of Lyra's slim, graceful figure, he saw a tall, thin man coming up the path.

He was not a Peterel fisherman or Barnstaple farmer—the only kind of visitors Mr. Chandos had as yet seen—but a man with the unmistakable London stamp. He was dressed in London clothes, wore a London tall silk hat, and carried a London umbrella.

The visitor knocked and waited; then Mr. Chandos heard him open the door and enter.

A moment afterward he heard a sound something between a groan and a cry of alarm proceed from the sitting-room below.

It startled Mr. Chandos pretty considerably, and it filled him with a burning, an intolerable curiosity.

He waited for a moment or two, then heard voices; the weak, reedy one of Mr. Chester, and a harsh, unsympathetic one; presumably the strange visitor's.

Mr. Chandos drew off his boots quickly, opened his door cautiously, and then as cautiously and noiselessly stole down the stairs, and, crouching beside the closed door of the parlor, listened.

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## CHAPTER XV.

THE high-souled poet, the exquisite and accomplished Mr. Chandos, crouched down beside the parlor door and listened. For a moment or two the voices came to him in a confused murmur, but presently he managed to hear what was going on.

"You must have known that this must have happened some day or other," said the stranger.

Mr. Chester groaned.

"I—I—didn't think, I forgot," he groaned.

"Ah!" retorted the visitor, grimly. "That's just like you—just like gentlemen of your sort. You didn't look forward. Now, a business man—"

"I'm not a business man; I never was a business man," sighed Mr. Chester.

The other laughed, not exactly unfeelingly, but in a dreary kind of way.

"No, I suppose not, or you wouldn't have done this sort of thing. What a pity it is that folks like you are ever taught to write! Talk about universal education! Seems to me that one half the people in the world would be happier if they'd never learned to put their pens to paper. Now, if you'd been taught to write—"

"I—I don't understand it even yet," said Mr. Chester, in a hoarse voice. "Try and explain it to me. Tell me slowly—slowly, Mr. Jarvin."

The man addressed as Jarvin "clucked" his lips half pityingly, half contemptuously.

"You mean to say you don't understand? Lord! a baby would understand it."

"I—I am worse than a child in these matters!" groaned Mr. Chester.

Mr. Jarvin clucked his lips again.

"'Pon my soul, I think you are! Look here." (Mr. Chandos crouched on his knee to the key-hole, and saw the visitor, who was seated on the extreme edge of a chair, strike a folded paper with his forefinger.) "Seven years ago—or as good as seven years ago—you borrowed five hundred pounds of Levy Moss. It is evident that you don't know much about business, or you wouldn't borrow five hundred farthings of such a man as Moss!" Mr. Chester sighed. "But you do borrow it, and you pay—do you know how much interest you pay? No, I'll be sworn you don't!" Mr. Chester shook his head and groaned. "Not you! That's the last question gentlemen like you trouble yourselves about. Well, I should say you paid sixty per cent. at the very least."

"That is a great deal," murmured Mr. Chester.

Mr. Jarvin laughed.

"I should think so! But you didn't pay so much as some men I know, after all. Well, Levy Moss renews this bill from time to time, and you go on paying the interest; and, I dare say, good old Moss would have let the bill run till doomsday so long as you were good enough to pay him his sixty per cent; but unfortunately, or, fortunately for you, as it may turn out, Moss makes a bad spec—the cutest of these chaps do sometimes—and has to realize, and he had to hand over the bill to me for money owing. And you may bet he didn't pay *me* sixty per cent," remarked Mr. Jarvin, viciously.

Mr. Chester blinked and groaned.



"Then—then if I understand it, I owe the money to you?" he said, falteringly.

"You do," asserted Mr. Jarvin, gravely. "Every penny of it."

"Then—then—why can't I go on owing it for—for a little longer?" asked Mr. Chester, not unnaturally. "I—I can pay the interest."

Mr. Jarvin shook his head.

"Sorry," he said, shutting his lips tight. "But I can't manage it. For one thing, I'm not sure, from all I hear, that you can go on paying the interest, and for another, I want the money. The market's tight, very tight, and it's as much as I can do to keep my head above water. I want—understand me, Mr. Chester—I *want* this five hundred, and I must have it. It's best to be plain and straightforward, isn't it? That's my way; whatever I am, I'm plain and straightforward. I always say what I mean; and when I say that I must have this money, why, I mean it, I really do."

Mr. Chandos saw Mr. Chester lean back and put his hand to his eyes—a pitiable spectacle, which, however, drew pity from neither Mr. Jarvin's nor Mr. Chandos's breast.

"I—I haven't the money," Mr. Chester said, at last, raising his eyes to the hard ones of the man who sat on the edge of the chair and stared like a stone image at his distress.

"That won't do, Mr. Chester—it won't, indeed," he said, remonstratingly. "It really won't do. You've had this money, you know, or part of it, for I suppose old Moss deducted the first year's interest?"

"He did."

"Just so. I thought so, but it's no business of mine. Moss is hard, very hard, always; but I'm not. I've given five hundred gold sovereigns for this bill, or as good as five hundred sovereigns, and I must have 'em back; now, mustn't I?"

"But—but if I haven't the money?" pleaded Mr. Chester; "and I haven't."

Mr. Jarvin shrugged his shoulders and glanced round the poorly furnished room, as if he were taking a mental inventory.

"I'm sorry, very sorry; as much for my sake as for your own; for, from what I can see, I'm afraid the sticks won't realize half, quarter the sum."

"The sticks?" repeated Mr. Chester, sadly, vaguely.

"The goods, the furniture. It's all had a deal of wear, and wasn't worth much when it was new, I should say."

Mr. Chester rose from his chair, then sunk back white and shaking.

"Do—do you mean—that—that you will sell the furniture, the house—turn us out?" he gasped.

Mr. Jarvin shook his head lugubriously.

"I'm very sorry," he said, in a funereal voice. "But what's to be done? You can't expect me to lose this money. But look here, Mr. Chester; it needn't come to selling out. You must have friends."

Mr. Chester shook his head.

"I—I have no friends," he said, huskily; "no friends at all. There is no one who would lend me this money to save my life. I have no one but my daughter"—his voice broke. "You—you can not, will not turn us both out into the streets—a young girl—"

He covered his face with his hands.

"Tut, tut!" said Mr. Jarvin, in his dry, raspy manner. "This is very—er—disagreeable; it is indeed. I'm very sorry for you and the young lady; but what can I do?" and he spread his hands out with an injured air. "I do hate having to do business with unbusiness-like persons. Just remember, Mr. Chester, that I'm only asking my fair due. Come, I'm sure you can get this money. You must have had some money some time. What's gone with it?"

Mr. Chester looked up with a half-frightened, half-guilty air.

"I—I—saw an advertisement of a limited company—a foreign—the Bongalaboo Tramway Company—and I—bought some shares. They were paying ten per cent."

Mr. Jarvin looked at him with a fine combination of pity and contempt.

"You went and invested in shares," he said; "and you know as much about limited companies as I know about—about the mountains of the moon; and I suppose they've gone down, eh?"

Mr. Chester bowed his head mournfully.

"Yes," he said, almost inaudibly. "I—I read in the paper that they had; but—but"—with a feverish wistfulness—"they may have gone up again; increased in value. I have sent for a newspaper. I shall see."

Mr. Jarvin rose.

"Dear! oh, dear! Well, all I can say is, Mr. Chester, that people like you don't deserve to have money; they don't, indeed! To go chucking good coin away in companies! Why the most knowing of us get bit, and you—" His feelings ap'

peared too strong for adequate expression. "Look here; I'm afraid you're in a nice mess; but perhaps these shares may turn out all right, and I'll wait a bit and see. I'll give you a fortnight."

Mr. Chester expressed his gratitude in broken, almost inarticulate words.

"Well, yes; it's unbusiness-like," remarked Mr. Jarvin, almost as if he were ashamed of his leniency; "but I'll do it. You shall have a fortnight; but, mind, that's the limit. You'll have to find the money by that time, or really I shall have to be compelled to—" He coughed, and polished up his hat on his sleeve, and Mr. Chandos removed his eye from the key-hole, and softly drew himself up the stairs as far as the landing, where he knelt down and watched through the balusters.

Mr. Chester either forgot to offer any hospitality or Mr. Jarvin declined it, for the man of business came out a moment or two afterward and left the house.

Mr. Chandos crept up to his own room, softly rubbing his back—he had got a crick in it from long kneeling—and his eye, which was chilled by subjection to the draught through the key-hole, and waited and listened with a thoughtful smile.

Half an hour later he heard the gate opened, and Lyra's step in the hall. He crept down to the lobby again and listened.

"I have brought you the paper, father," he heard her say; then she stopped, and in a tone of alarm exclaimed: "Father, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

"No, no!" he faltered. "Give me the paper."

Mr. Chandos could hear it rustling in the shaking hands, and knew, though he could not see her, that she was bending over him, with tender anxiety. Then came a low cry of despair and grief, and a faint scream from Lyra.

With the proper expression of concern and consternation, Mr. Chandos limped down-stairs and into the room. Mr. Chester was lying back, white and unconscious, and Lyra was kneeling by his side almost as white as himself; the paper lay beside the chair where it had fallen from the limp hands.

Mr. Chandos behaved like a ministering angel.

"Don't be alarmed; pray, pray, don't be alarmed, dear, dear Miss Lyra," he murmured. "He has only fainted. It is nothing serious. Yes, some water"—for Lyra, after the first moment of paralyzing terror, had flown for some—"he will be all right presently. See, he is coming to. Now don't,



pray don't be alarmed. Remember, I am here," he added, as if he were the whole College of Physicians rolled into one man.

"Oh, what is it?" said Lyra, with her arm round her father's neck, his head on her bosom.

"It is only a fainting fit; I am subject to them myself," said Mr. Chandos, bathing Mr. Chester's forehead, and deftly pushing the newspaper out of sight under the chair.

Mr. Chester with a deep sigh came back to the world which we somehow or other manage to make a very troublous one, and as his eyes rested on Lyra he moaned and let his head sink on his breast. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he was conscious of all she was to him.

"My poor girl!" he murmured, as she pressed him to her in an agony of apprehension.

"What is it, father?" she besought him.

"My poor child!" he moaned again. "Lyra—" but Mr. Chandos's suave voice slipped in:

"I don't think you should excite yourself by talking, my dear sir. Keep quite for a few minutes, and then we will help you to your room."

Mr. Chester, after a glance round the parlor, as if he expected to still see the odious figure of his creditor, sunk back.

"We will get him upstairs, dear Miss Lyra," murmured Mr. Chandos; "and—then—I don't think I would permit him to talk at all to-night. We will send for the doctor—pray do not cry—" There were no tears in Lyra's eyes, her grief and terror being beyond tears. "I can not be too thankful that I am by your side in this hour of trouble."

Between them—Mr. Chandos still keeping up his limp—they got the stricken old man to his room.

"I will send Mary to you the moment she comes in," murmured Mr. Chandos, "and Griffith shall go for the doctor. And be sure you do not let him talk and excite himself."

This spurious sympathy was rewarded by a look of gratitude from Lyra's eyes, and feeling quite like a good Samaritan, he went down to the parlor—without the limp—and fishing out the newspaper from under the chair, turned to the money article.

Running down the stock and share quotations, he came to the Bongalaboo Tramway Company. Its shares had gone down to zero; and Mr. Chester was indeed a ruined man.

Mr. Chandos read the disastrous information with a complacent smile of profound satisfaction, then carefully tore out the portion of the paper which contained the money news, and popped it in the fire.

"What a piece of luck!" he murmured, his pale eyes glistening, his thin lips still smiling. "Yes, my dear Miss Lyra, I think it will be my turn to laugh presently."

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## CHAPTER XVI.

LYRA sat beside her father all that night. When trouble comes it comes in battalions and not in single spies, and this trouble of her father's sharp and sudden illness, following so closely on the discovery of her love and loss of Dane, confused and bewildered her.

The doctor whom Griffith brought from Barnstaple was no better and no worse than the usual run of medicos, but he was an honest man and he owned himself puzzled. He couldn't account for the fainting fit. The heart was weak, he said—to Mr. Chandos—as the heart of a man who pores over books and takes no exercise must be; but he, the doctor, was inclined to think that there must have been some mental disturbance. Did he, Mr. Chandos, know of any matter that might be troubling the sick man?

Mr. Chandos shook his head and looked innocently round the parlor in which he and the doctor were talking.

"No," he said; "I should say there was nothing whatever to trouble Mr. Chester. He leads a remarkably quiet and reposeful life, as you may imagine, and appears to be singularly happy and contented in the society of his daughter and his beloved books."

"You are a friend of the family?" asked the doctor as he pulled on his driving-gloves.

"Yes," said Mr. Chandos, blandly. "I am here on a visit; have been detained by an accident to my foot; and of course—of course—I shall remain while I can be of any service."

"Quite right; very good of you, my dear sir," said the simple-minded doctor, who thought Mr. Chandos a very nice man indeed—a very kind-hearted, considerate man, in fact. "You can be of the greatest service. It seems to me that the poor young lady upstairs is singularly lonely and friendless. Yes, stay by all means."

Lyra held her father's hand all night. He did not seem to be in any pain, and he slept at intervals; but in his sleep he moaned as if something was troubling him, and once he breathed her name pityingly, lovingly.

When he woke in the early morning his eyes turned to her, and he sighed deeply.

"Lyra," he murmured, in a hollow voice, "are you there? I—I have something to tell you."

"No, no, dear," she said, laying her face against his; "you must not talk. You shall tell me when you are better, when you are quite well. You must do nothing but sleep and rest now;" and she kissed and soothed him.

Mr. Chester was a weak man in every sense of the word, and grasped at the chance of postponing the confession of his folly. So he turned away from her with a stifled groan and closed his eyes.

For three days he lay thus, and Lyra scarcely left the bedside. On the fourth he was well enough to leave his bed; but it was a feeble and broken man, the shadow of even his former weak and feeble self, who sat beside the window looking over the Taw, his head sunk on his breast, his eyes fixed on vacancy, yet with an expression in them as if he were waiting for some great sorrow.

And during all this time Mr. Chandos still behaved like a ministering angel. He lost his limp and went to Barnstaple for jellies and other delicacies, sat beside the old man and read to him, and in every way played the part of the devoted and self-sacrificing friend. Even Griffith, who hovered about the place, anxious and troubled, and sometimes entered the sick-room, was forced to admit, with a grunt, that Mr. Chandos was behaving very well, and was not such a fool as he, Griffith, thought him.

The doctor came and looked at the old man, with the queer, inscrutable expression which doctors seem to acquire as part of their profession, and said: yes, he was getting better; and sent him tonics and spoke hopefully to Lyra; but he was grave and less cheerful with Mr. Chandos.

"He is very weak, Mr. Barle," he said. "Very. I can't help thinking that there is something on his mind. He seems to be always brooding. I don't like to ask Miss Chester—by the way, she must take more rest, or she will break down. She is strong, I know, but this perpetual anxiety—"

"I will see that she has some rest," said Mr. Chandos. "I know that she is doing too much, but I will put a stop to it. Mary and I can relieve her. Yes, I will see that she has more rest." And Mr. Chandos spoke with such sympathetic consideration that the doctor went away, confirmed in his opinion that Mr. Geoffrey Barle was a nice, unselfish man and a true friend.

That afternoon Mr. Chandos whispered softly to Lyra, who



sat beside her father, holding his hand and looking as she was looking, over the Taw:

"Will you come into the garden for a little while, Miss Lyra?"

Lyra glanced at her father.

"I can not leave him," she said, in a low voice; "he misses me if I go away for even a few minutes."

"You must come, please," he said, with gentle persuasion. "I—there is something I want to say to you. Mary will stay with him."

Lyra got up reluctantly and went down-stairs and into the garden. She had not left the house for four days, and the scent of the roses and the pinks came upon her with a peculiar sense of strangeness. It seemed weeks, months, since she had stood in the garden with Lord Dane by her side. She went and sat down on the rustic seat behind the hedge, and as she looked round with sad, dreamy eyes, the morning she and Dane had sat there and talked together came back to her as vividly as if it had been only yesterday.

Mr. Chandos's voice woke her from her reverie and dispelled the vision.

"You are making yourself ill, dear Miss Lyra," he said, in his soft voice. "That will not do—indeed it will not. If you were to break down I do not know what we should all do? You must take more rest—"

Lyra turned her sad eyes absently upon him.

"I am quite well," she said. "I am very strong, stronger than you think. Do you think my father is getting better?" she asked, with tremulous eagerness. "Please—please tell me the truth."

"Yes, yes," he said—"oh, yes, he is getting better. He is very ill, as a man must be who suffered such a shock as he suffered."

"Shock?" said Lyra, starting slightly, her eyes fixed anxiously on him. "What shock? Oh, what do you mean, Mr. Barle?"

Mr. Chandos looked aside, as if he had been guilty of a slip of the tongue.

"I—er—tut, tut!—I did not mean—" He faltered.

Lyra put her hand on his arm.

"You did not mean to say what? You know something about my father's illness. You are trying to keep something from me. Oh, do not, do not! Tell me, please! Are you afraid I can not bear it? You need not be. I can bear anything—but this uncertainty—suspense."

Mr. Chandos, with still averted eyes, let his hand fall on her hand upon his arm, and pressed it soothingly, encouragingly.

"I ought to have been more careful," he murmured. "I have tried—indeed, I have tried—to conceal it from you, to keep you in ignorance."

"What is it you have tried to keep from me?" said Lyra, looking earnestly into his averted face. "Why should you keep me in ignorance? I am his daughter, and—and I am not a child. What is it?"

"One always desires to keep trouble—the shadow of trouble—from falling on those one lov—likes," murmured the sympathetic Chandos.

Lyra's hand dropped, but her eyes still scanned his face.

"You have no right to keep anything from me," she said, with sad dignity. "If you know the cause of my father's illness—if you know of anything that is troubling him, you should tell me. Tell me at once, please."

"I—I only heard it by accident," murmured Mr. Chandos, humbly; "and if I have kept it from you it was from a desire to shield you."

"There is something that troubles him!" murmured Lyra, more to herself than him. "Tell me, please, Mr. Barle! I will, I *must* know! Has anything happened—is any one dead?"

"No, no," he said. "It is a money trouble, dear Miss Lyra."

"A money trouble," she echoed, looking at him with a confused, bewildered expression in her lovely face.

"Yes," he said, with a sigh, "a serious trouble; but don't be alarmed, I—"

"Tell me, tell me!" she cried, tremulously.

Mr. Chandos shook his head sympathetically.

"Your father is in want of a large sum of money, dear Miss Lyra. A creditor—a hard-hearted creditor—is pressing him for a large sum—five hundred pounds—which it appears your father borrowed some years ago and seems to have almost forgotten."

"Well," said Lyra, "can he not pay it? If he borrowed it he can pay it." And there was a touch of pride in her voice.

Mr. Chandos shook his head.

"Alas! I fear not; indeed, I am sure he can not, and it is this that is crushing him and keeping him ill."

"My father"—her voice broke—"my father can not pay his debts?"

Mr. Chandos shook his head and sighed.

"I fear not. Do not blame him, dear Miss Lyra—"

"Blame him?" The idea was a sacrilege.

"But of course you will not. He has been unfortunate; we are all of us unfortunate in money matters at times. His investments have gone wrong—they will—they do sometimes, just when it is most inconvenient. But you understand now what it is that is troubling him. It is a terrible prospect for a man of his age."

"Terrible prospect?" she echoed, gazing at him, her hands tightly clasped.

"Yes," he murmured. "To have one's house sold over one's head, to be turned adrift into the world—an old and feeble man—"

Lyra rose with a cry, a low, but terrible cry, her hands stretched out before her, then sunk into the seat again.

Mr. Chandos watched her.

"My dear, dear Miss Lyra!" he murmured, with deepest sympathy. "Don't take it to heart so much! Pray, pray be calm! It is true it is terrible, dreadful to contemplate; an old man in his state of health without home or money or friends. But, I forget; you may have friends who will help you?"

"Friends?" her voice sounded hollow and despairing.

"No. I know of none. Oh! my poor father!" and she hid her face in her hands, but only for a moment.

"No?" murmured Mr. Chandos. "Are you sure? Dear, dear! this is very, dreadfully, sad. It wrings my heart. Oh, something must be done, Miss Lyra."

She scarcely heard him and did not respond.

He drew a little nearer and touched her arm with the tip of his fingers.

"Miss Lyra, will you let me help you?"

"You?"

She turned her wild, sorrow-laden eyes upon him.

"Yes, I. It is true I can scarcely dare to call myself by such a sacred name as 'friend,' though—ah! if you could only see my heart"—he paused dramatically and laid his hand over the spot where that troublesome organ is generally placed—"if you could see my heart, you would know how truly, how sympathetically it throbs for you. I would lay down my life for you; I would go to the stake to save you from an hour's, a moment's unhappiness. Lyra, you must know—you can not be ignorant of the fact that I—I love you." Lyra still gazed before her with wild, sorrow-laden eyes. He drew a little closer to her. "I love you with all my heart and soul,



You are my goddess—my queen—my chief rose in a garden of roses!" A glimmer of the meaning of his words began to dawn upon her. She shrunk from him slightly. "I love you!" he went on, sidling up to her, his pale-blue eyes glowing, his lips working, in his earnestness; for at that moment Mr. Chandos was as earnest in the pursuit of his prey as Dane would have been in the Rockies after deer or bears.

"You—love me?"

The words fell from her lips mechanically, and she looked at him with wild amazement.

"Yes—yes, a hundred times! Don't speak! Listen to me—wait till I have told you all. Lyra, I can help you, I can help your father, if—if you will give me the right to do so."

"The right?"

She echoed the words, her hand to her forehead.

"Yes," he murmured, almost hoarsely, for Mr. Chandos was terribly in earnest. Her beauty sent the blood coursing through his veins; the hope, the chance of winning her—of getting her in his power, of seeing her soon at his feet—made his brain burn. "Yes, the sweetest, the divinest right. Lyra, I am a poor man, but I can help your father—you—out of this strait. If matters are allowed to take their course, he will be turned out of house and home. It will—alas! I fear it will kill him." She leaned back panting, her face deathly white. "You know how weak, how ill he is; and this man, his creditor, is inexorable; he will have no pity. You, who do not know anything of the world, can not imagine how heartless and pitiless men can be where money is concerned. Yes, I fear it will kill him. But I can save him. I am a poor man, but I can raise this money—sufficient to ward off this danger—I can save your father, Lyra. Only give me the right. Lyra"—he took her hand, cold as ice, in his hot one—"Lyra, say that you will be my wife, and I will save your father."

A shudder ran through her. She drew her hand from his, and drew her head, herself away, as she would have shrunk from some loathsome reptile.

"Your—wife!" fell from her white lips; and as she uttered the words there rose the vision of Dane, the man who had stolen the heart from her bosom. "Your wife!"

At the expression of her face, the tone of her voice, Mr. Chandos's own expression grew anxious; but he controlled it.

"Yes, dearest, dearest Lyra. You can not hesitate. You—you do not hate me?"

Lyra could not force a "No" to her lips.

"You will not refuse my aid?" he went on, in a low, per-

suasive voice. "You, who love your father, will not stand by and see him cast out into the streets, when one word, a simple 'Yes,' will save him? Think; I will pay this money, I will take this awful burden off his shoulders, I will be his friend for life, if you will only promise to be my wife. See, Lyra, it rests with you. Your father's fate is in your hands."

She bent forward, her hands clasped in her lap, her lovely eyes fixed in a wild, distraught gaze. Her father and—yet, Dane—rose before her like specters. To be this man's wife! The horror of the idea benumbed her. This man's wife! To be his entirely, wholly! To be linked with him until she or he died! She shook and quivered with repugnance.

"What is your answer, Lyra dearest?" he murmured. "Do you refuse to save your father?"

He was wise to harp upon that, the principal string. It was irresistible.

She turned to him slowly, like a statue of stone imbued with the power of movement only.

"I—I will do what you wish," she panted almost inarticulately. "You—you will give my father this money—you will save him?"

"Yes, yes!" he cried, unwisely putting his arm round her; for at his touch she shrunk away from him, and scarcely refrained from thrusting him from her. "Yes, Lyra, dearest, my own, my very own, I will get the money; the debt shall be paid; your father shall be spared any further anxiety; and you—ah, Lyra! dear, dear Lyra! I will try to make you happy. We will lead the sweetest, the gayest of lives. We will go to Paris."

She rose, clutching the arm of the seat, as if to fly from his touch.

"Tell—tell—my father," she panted.

Mr. Chandos bit his lip.

"A moment, dearest," he said. "I—I think it would be as well if we kept the fact of our engagement a secret even from him."

"A secret?" she said, in a lifeless way.

"Yes," he murmured, suavely. "Sit down, dear one, and listen to me."

She did not sit down, but stood grasping the seat, her face turned from him.

"I—er—" Mr. Chandos cleared his throat. "There are reasons why our engagement, marriage, should be kept secret," he said, rather huskily, his pale-blue eyes watching her intently. "I am dependent upon a relative—an uncle—whc

—who might, probably would, refuse his consent, to what he—he would consider an imprudent marriage. We—we shall have to be married quite quietly—er—in fact, I may say secretly. Even your father must not—er—know of it. Do you mind, dearest? It is for your sake as well as my own that I say this.”

Lyra shook her head in a dull, apathetic way.

Mr. Chandos moistened his lips.

“My dear Lyra, how sensible, how sweetly sensible you are. Yes, our marriage must be kept a close secret. I must think of a plan”—he knit his brows and looked thoughtful, as if his plan, his vile plan, were not already cut and dried—“by which we can keep the whole affair to ourselves. But leave that to me, dearest Lyra.”

She let her eyes fall on him. His face was flushed, his lips quivering.

“Won’t you—won’t you let me give you one kiss, our betrothal kiss?”

She stood like a figure of stone, her beautiful face white as marble itself, then she moved, statue-like, toward him; but as he rose and approached her she drew back.

“Not—not yet. Give—give me time!” broke from her white lips; and staggering like a person recovering from a swoon, she went into the house.

Mr. Chandos sunk back into the seat, biting his lips.

“Oh, very well, very well, my dear,” he muttered, with a sinister smile of disappointment. “I can wait a little longer, a little longer.”

He remained in the arbor for some minutes, smiling at times, at others gnawing at his lips, for Mr. Chandos was engaged in rather a dangerous game; then he went into the house and up to Mr. Chester’s room.

The old man was lying back in his arm-chair, his eyes fixed on the window; Lyra was sitting at his feet, her head resting on his knee. She did not move as Mr. Chandos entered and came up to the chair.

“Mr. Chester,” he said, in his soft, suave voice—“Mr. Chester.”

Mr. Chester turned his wasted face and faded, care-worn eyes on him.

“You will be glad to hear,” said Mr. Chandos, in a voice of tender benevolence, “that the little matter that has been troubling you has been arranged.”

Mr. Chester knit his brows with an expression of mental confusion.



"The matter—" he faltered, in a thin, husky voice.

"The matter of the five hundred pounds—the bill," said Mr. Chandos, with a glance at Lyra's downcast face.

"The bill?" repeated Mr. Chester, dully, vacantly.

"Yes. It will be settled—ahem!—at least, I have every reason to think it will be; will it not, Lyra?"

She raised her head slowly and looked up at her father, her eyes full of loving tenderness and self-sacrifice.

"Yes, father—yes," she breathed; then her head sunk upon his knee again.

That same evening Mr. Chandos walked over to Barnstaple. It was by no means a chilly evening, but for reasons best known to himself he wore the collar of his coat turned up, and his romantic, poetic wide-awake tilted well over his forehead; and when, after several inquiries, he found No. 28 Clongate Street, and the door was opened to him, it was with quite a different voice to his ordinary one—a voice that one would almost have imagined was carefully disguised—that he asked for Mr. Robert Rawdon.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

AN untidy, smutty-visaged "slavey" opened the door—a few inches only—of 28 Clongate Street, and stared at Mr. Chandos's muffled face.

"Is Mr. Robert Rawdon at home?" he asked, in a carefully disguised voice.

The girl peered at him suspiciously.

"I dunno," she said, evasively. "What do 'ee want with him?" and she pushed the door closer with her foot.

Mr. Chandos stuck a shilling in between her grimy fingers.

"Perhaps you'll go and see," he said, blandly.

The girl put the shilling in her mouth and shut the door; but after a moment or two it was opened, as cautiously as before, and Rawdon peered round.

"How do you do, Rawdon?" said Mr. Chandos.

Rawdon started, but looked relieved.

"Oh, it's only you, is it?" he said. "Come in. Be quick, please."

Mr. Chandos slipped in through the narrow opening, and Rawdon closed the door and locked it.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "I'll get a light." He disappeared, leaving Mr. Chandos in the dark and not particularly pleasant-smelling passage, and reappeared with a candle stuck in an empty gin bottle. "Come upstairs," he said.

Mr. Chandos followed him up a rickety staircase, very nearly treading on a remarkably dirty infant who was engaged in sucking the balusters, and entered a dingy room which smelled of herrings, beer, and stale tobacco.

It was the shabbiest and most unsavory apartment the elegant Mr. Chandos had ever seen, and he held his breath and looked round appalled.

Rawdon drew a chair forward, one of those ingenious contrivances which provide a chair by day and a bed by night.

"Take a seat," he said. "Don't sit down too—too hard or suddenly."

Mr. Chandos arrested himself half-way and looked round nervously.

"Oh, it's all right if you're tolerably careful," said Rawdon, reassuringly.

Mr. Chandos sat down gingerly and clutched the arms of the chair.

"It's very good of you to look me up," said Rawdon. "I'm sorry I haven't a better place to receive you in."

He looked round the room with a weary kind of disgust.

"Not at all," murmured Mr. Chandos, pleasantly. "Honest poverty is always respectable, my dear Rawdon."

"Is it?" said Rawdon, sardonically. "That's rot. Poverty, whether honest or the other thing, never is respectable. You know that as well as I do."

He reached for a pipe as he spoke, a black, grimy brier, and got out a pouch from his frayed pocket, but the pouch was empty and he tossed it and the pipe on the mantel-shelf.

Mr. Chandos watched his friend and former college chum with covert scrutiny. Mr. Rawdon looked even more dissipated and raffish than he had looked on the night Mr. Chandos had met him on the street. His face was pale and haggard, with dark hollows under the eyes, and a crop of blue bristles round his chin, and his lips twitched nervously.

"I can't offer you any refreshment, Chandos," he said, sticking his hands in his pockets and leaning moodily against the grimy mantel-piece. "There isn't a thing to eat or drink in the house—or the room, for I've only got this room. You must take the will for the deed."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Chandos, amiably. "Perhaps—er—perhaps you would allow me to—to—" he drew some silver from his pocket as he spoke in a tentative way; but he need not have been so modest and hesitating.

"Allow you to stand treat?" said Rawdon, with a sort of bitter promptness. "Of course I will."

Mr. Chandos laid half a crown on the table covered with a sticky cloth, and Rawdon took up the coin with an affected indifference.

"What shall it be?" he said, his eyes beginning to glitter with a thirsty, eager look. "I suppose you'd like whisky, or brandy? They sell very good gin at the pub. round the corner," he added, suggestively.

"Whichever you please; let it be gin, as you recommend it, my dear Rawdon," said Mr. Chandos, blandly.

Rawdon went to the door and called "Polly!" but in a rather subdued voice.

The slipshod girl could be heard struggling up the stairs, and a whispered colloquy ensued between her and Rawdon. "Mind, best Plymouth unsweetened! There, I'll let you out," Mr. Chandos heard him say, and he also heard the key turned in the street door.

Rawdon waited in the passage for the girl's return, and Mr. Chandos passed the time in an examination of the room. Its dirt and squalor made him shudder; "and there won't be a glass fit to drink out of!" he murmured to himself, plaintively; but he sunk back—carefully—and smiled pleasantly as Rawdon entered, lovingly nursing a gin bottle under his arm and carrying a jug of hot water.

"It's best hot," he said; "but you can have some cold water if you like."

"I prefer it as you do," said Mr. Chandos. "Your house seems indeed to be a castle, my dear Rawdon," he remarked, sipping the steaming grog. "You take as many precautions with the front door as if it were the gate of a besieged fortress."

"So it is," said Rawdon, taking a great draught of the grog, and filling up his glass with neat gin. "So it is," and he laughed a short, defiant laugh. "It is besieged by duns. I'm stone broke, and that's a fact, Chandos; clean stone broke. I owe money everywhere, though how the devil I've managed it I can't think, seeing that I never seem to have half enough to eat, and not a quarter enough to drink, and no new clothes. Poverty respectable?" and he refilled his glass and laughed bitterly.

"I'm extremely sorry to see you in this plight, especially as it is undeserved, as I am sure it is."

Rawdon glanced at him, suspecting sarcasm, but Mr. Chandos's expression was blandly sympathetic as he sipped his gin and water.

"Thanks," said Rawdon, bluntly. "Very kind of you;



but soft words butter no parsnips—not that I've any to butter, by the way. And so you've come to look me up, have you, just for old friendship's sake? 'Pon my soul, I didn't expect it of you."

Mr. Chandos's eyes fell.

"Did you not? You do me an injustice, my dear Rawdon. I never"—he leaned forward, but hastily sat back as the chair creaked threateningly—"I never forget an old friend."

"Thanks," said Rawdon again, and more genially; hot gin and water has a mellowing influence, it is said.

"Yes," said the generous-hearted Mr. Chandos, "I am as pleased to visit you in this—er—not too luxurious apartment, my dear Rawdon, as if you were snugly housed in some cozy country vicarage, as you ought to be."

"For God's sake, don't harp on that string, and call up past hopes and visions," said Rawdon, huskily. "Have a pipe. I told the girl to spend the change in 'bacca.'"

Mr. Chandos declined, and tried not to cough, as Rawdon at once proceeded to fill the room with the fumes of a most potent shag.

"I thought you had left the neighborhood," said Rawdon, sinking into a chair, and leaning back with his hand caressing the tumbler.

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Chandos. "It is so beautiful, so picturesque, that I have been tempted to stay on and—er—study it. Besides, I should not have thought of leaving it without coming to see you, and—er—pray, forgive me, Rawdon—venturing to offer you some light—ahem!—pecuniary assistance."

Rawdon stared at him and flushed.

"You mean it?" he said, with some, not very flattering, astonishment. "I thought you were going to say 'offer you some advice.' And upon my word, if you had, I should have felt inclined to chuck this glass at you—it's empty. You really mean to give me a hand? Excuse my incredulity, but you refused to loan me a simple fiver the other night, you know."

"I had not my purse with me," said Chandos.

"Left it on the piano at the hotel; I see," said Rawdon. "Well, better late than never; and, by George! no poor devil ever wanted a friend more than I do, Chandos."

"I am afraid that is true," said Mr. Chandos. "Dear me, it seems as if it must be some other person than yourself sitting there in this—er—rather gloomy-looking room. When I look back to the old college times—the nice parties, the private theatricals—"

"Don't look back if it hurts you," broke in Rawdon; "though it can't hurt you more than it hurts me. How much are you going to lend me, Chandos? Make it as much as you can."

Chandos looked down pensively and sighed.

"I want to be of some real, some lasting service to you, my dear Rawdon," he said. "I feel that a paltry five-pound note, such as you asked me for the other night, can not be of much use to you; it can only relieve your—er—poverty in the most temporary way."

"It will give me something to eat, drink, and smoke for a fortnight or more," remarked Rawdon, laconically.

"Just so; and after?" murmured Mr. Chandos.

"After that the deluge!" exclaimed Rawdon, with a laugh.

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."

Mr. Chandos shook his head with gentle rebuke.

"Ah, my dear friend, if you could only learn to think more of the future!"

Rawdon laughed sardonically.

"For Heaven's sake, don't try to preach, Chandos!" he said. "You look too killingly funny. What is it you mean? What is it you're aiming at?"

Mr. Chandos seemed to ponder.

"Well, my dear Rawdon," he said, "I have been thinking over your sad fate, and it seems to me that with your brilliant attainments, with your ripe scholarship and—er—"

"Gift of the gab!"

"Great oratorical powers," continued Mr. Chandos, "you ought to be able to carve out for yourself a new, perhaps a great career in another sphere."

"Do you mean heaven, or the other place?" asked Rawdon, bluntly.

"I mean in one of our colonies, my dear Rawdon," said Mr. Chandos.

Rawdon laughed grimly.

"Thanks. I know; steerage passage paid to Australia, New Zealand, anywhere; land with two pounds ten in your pocket, and when that's spent, take to breaking stone. Thanks. I can break stones here in England, when I happen to take a fancy to that artistic industry."

"No, no, my dear Rawdon, you misunderstand me," said Mr. Chandos. "I meant nothing so—er—absurd. What I proposed to myself to offer you was a passage paid to one of our most flourishing colonies, and—er—sufficient capital to enable you to look round and find congenial employment."

Rawdon almost let the pipe drop out of his mouth, and stared at the benevolently smiling Mr. Chandos as if he could not believe his senses.

"You—you mean to do that for me?" he said, huskily. "You—Chandos Armitage—I beg your pardon; but—well, good Lord, it seems too good to be true—it seems— How much did you mean to give—lend? I swear, if things go right with me, I'll pay you back. I swear it, Chandos!"

"I am quite sure you will, my dear Rawdon," said Mr. Chandos, sweetly. "I know your upright, honorable nature so well. How much? Well, do you think fifty pounds would be sufficient?"

Rawdon rose from his chair and then sunk down again. His face flushed, then turned pale, and there were tears in his bleared eyes; tears which owed their existence to the emotion of gratitude as well as hot gin and water.

"Fifty pounds!" he said, huskily. "My dear Chandos— But"—his voice broke and he started up again—"but this isn't a joke, a jest, on your part, is it? You are not playing it down on me?" a savage light gleamed in his eyes through the tears.

"No, no. Sit down, I beg," said Chandos. "Er—er—will you give me a little more of the—er—gin? It is excellent, excellent. And do look after yourself, my dear Rawdon."

Rawdon, with an unsteady hand, replenished the glasses, nearly filling his own, as Mr. Chandos noticed, with neat gin.

"As an earnest of my desire to help you, let me offer you a small loan to commence with."

He fumbled in his pocket.

"Tut, tut! I have left my purse at home—I had a five-pound note in it"—Rawdon began to laugh suspiciously, ironically—"but I have some loose change." He laid a couple of sovereigns on the table and some silver. "That will keep you afloat until I can give you the remainder. You will not mind waiting a few days, my dear Rawdon?"

Rawdon picked up the money and turned it over as if he expected it to transform itself into dead leaves, like the money in the "Arabian Nights'" story; then, when he had quite assured himself that it was genuine coin of the realm, he dropped it into his pocket and sunk into the chair with a sigh of amazement and gratitude combined.

"Mind waiting?" he said. "Of course not! That is, if it isn't too long. I could hold out here for a few days—a week.



You don't expect me to pay my debts before I start, eh?" and he grinned.

Mr. Chandos looked down.

"I leave that to you, my dear Rawdon," he said, gravely. "I am afraid that if you did—er—that you would not have much left. I leave that to you."

Rawdon nodded and laughed.

"Not such a fool!" he said. "It would be a waste of good money; for once out of this cursed country, you won't see me back; no, not if I have to take to stone-breaking. And you will do this for me—lend me this money without security? Look here, Chandos, I've done you an injustice; I've thought badly of you since the other night. I beg your pardon. You're a good fellow, a true friend, and—and—God bless you!"

He held out his hand and Chandos took it. Perhaps something in Mr. Chandos's cold paw, perhaps something in his sleek face, or pale-blue eyes, again roused Rawdon's suspicions, for he dropped the hand suddenly and scanned his friend's countenance.

"Chandos, you are going to do all this for nothing—for the sake of old friendship? Isn't there something you want for it, something you want me to do?"

Mr. Chandos smiled sweetly.

"No, no, my dear Rawdon," he said. "There is nothing. Nothing—I think." He seemed to ponder. "If you really think you would like to make me some return, I wish there *was* something. Let me think. Ah, yes! my dear Rawdon, there is a slight service you could render me—"

"I thought so," said Rawdon, with an indrawing of his lips. "What is it?"

Mr. Chandos, still smiling sweetly, motioned his friend to his chair, and, as he did so, replenished Rawdon's glass.

"It is a small, a very small matter. Scarcely worth your notice, my dear Rawdon, and I shall not be at all surprised or offended if you decline."

Rawdon took a drink and watched his benefactor silently.

"You remember the theatricals we used to have?" said Mr. Chandos, "and how splendidly you used to play? Well, I want you to take part in some—er—theatricals for me."

"What part?"

"The—er—part of a clergyman," said Mr. Chandos, blandly, airily.

"A clergyman?" echoed Rawdon, frowning.

"Yes; you would play it so well," murmured Mr. Chandos. "You would look and speak the part so perfectly, my dear

Rawdon. And now that I come to think of it, it is only for a rehearsal that I shall require you."

"A rehearsal?" said Rawdon, still frowning.

"Yes," said Mr. Chandos. "The—er—young lady who plays the part of the bride—"

"It is a marriage, a wedding, then?"

"Exactly," assented Mr. Chandos. "How quick you always are! Ah, my dear Rawdon, in another sphere, in sunnier climes than these, your quickness, your adroitness will meet with their reward!"

"Go on."

"I—er—the young lady who plays the part of the bride has a peculiar fancy, a strange whim. She wants, I think, to give an air of realism, she wants to thoroughly realize the character, and she is therefore anxious that the rehearsal of the wedding ceremony should take place in a—er—real church."

Rawdon started and stared under his brows at the sleek, the blandly smiling Mr. Chandos.

"A real church? What the devil do you mean?"

"Well, when I say a real church I allude to a hoary old ruin near here, which, I think, bears the name of St. Mark's."

Rawdon nodded silently, and refilled his pipe, which in his astonishment he had allowed to go out.

"St. Mark's—yes," said Mr. Chandos, suavely. "The rehearsal will be quite—er—private; there will only be the bride and bridegroom and clergyman present."

Rawdon raised his head.

"Who is to be the—who is to play the part of bridegroom?" he asked.

Mr. Chandos, smiling like a cherub, touched his own bosom.

"I, my dear Rawdon."

Rawdon sprung to his feet, then sunk into his chair again.

"By Heaven, I—I thought so!" he muttered.

"It is a small matter, a very trivial affair," said Mr. Chandos. "You will only be engaged a few minutes—how long does the marriage ceremony take? And—er—you can play your part the day before you sail for the colonies."

Rawdon rose and stood with his back to him.

"Chandos," he said, hoarsely, "do you know what this means for both of us?"

Mr. Chandos smiled.

"Pardon, my dear Rawdon?"

"It means penal servitude, perhaps for life," whispered Rawdon, almost inaudibly.

Mr. Chandos laughed.

"My dear Rawdon, your usual good sense seems to have taken leave of you. Penal servitude for a piece of harmless foolery, for a piece of amateur play-acting. Tut, tut! my dear fellow, you are—forgive me—absurd;" and he laughed a laugh of pleasant badinage.

"I know what I'm talking about," said Rawdon, grimly; "and, by Heaven! I see your game. Chandos, you must be mad to—run such a risk. Besides, the girl—whoever she is—can not be so ignorant of the world—" his voice died away, and his hand—it trembled—reached for the glass of almost neat gin.

"My dear Rawdon, pray clear your mind of such absurd and ridiculous misapprehensions. This is merely a rehearsal of a portion of a play some friends and I are getting up for future representation. All—mark me—all you have to do is to attend at an appointed place—in the ordinary garb of a clergyman—and repeat the marriage service; not a difficult part, you'll admit."

"I—by—" Rawdon swore—"I can not do it!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Chandos, "I will not force you. Er—er—touching this money I offered you, my dear Rawdon. There may be, I say there *may* be some difficulty in raising it. You mustn't be disappointed if I fail in carrying out my intention of helping an old friend."

Rawdon sunk into the chair from which he had risen, and hid his face in his hands, and Mr. Chandos stole to his side and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Tut, tut! My dear Rawdon, you are absurdly, childishly nervous and fearful. Remember, if you don't wish your name to appear, it need not. If you like, you can, when you dress for the part, wear one of those wigs the clever costumers make; a wig no one could possibly recognize you in, and after the ceremony—ahem!—the rehearsal—is over, you can join your ship. You leave the country never to return."

Rawdon jerked off the hand from his shoulder.

"Chandos!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, "you—you are a devil!"

Mr. Chandos laughed at his friend's very extravagant compliment.

"No, no; it is you who are a very foolish fellow," he murmured, persuasively. "Dear me, to refuse me this slight service when I am so anxious to help you. Tut, tut! my dear Rawdon, you must be very fond of poverty, and duns, and dirt—and with such abilities, such prospects. Who knows what position you may not attain to in the distant land to which I



had hoped I should assist you. Who knows! My dear Rawdon, this is, believe me, the great chance, the golden opportunity of your life."

As he spoke he stealthily filled the tempted man's glass.

"But come, never mind. Drink up, my dear Rawdon, and let us part good friends."

He insinuated the glass into Rawdon's shaking hands.

Rawdon took a long draught. His face flushed—he rose and struck Chandos on the back and laughed—a shaky, hysterical laugh.

"I'll—I'll do it," he said. "Mind, I take no risk. I leave the moment the—the play's over, and I have the money in my hand while I read the service—you hear?"

"My dear Rawdon," murmured Mr. Chandos, "of course you shall. You shall be treated with all the consideration due to a talented actor I engaged to play a difficult, delicate part."

Rawdon sunk into the chair, white and haggard, notwithstanding the gin.

"Yes," he said, hoarsely, "I'll do it. I'd—I'd commit murder—by Heaven, this is worse!—for one more chance in life!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. CHANDOS, as he walked home to the mill cottage that night, sometimes chuckled and glowed with satisfaction, and sometimes grew pale and felt nervous.

It was a terribly dangerous game he was playing, but the great god, Chance, was helping him, and the prize was so great, he coveted it with so mad a longing, that he felt as if he must grasp it at any risk.

To have Lyra, who had laughed at him, Lyra, with all her loveliness and innocence, in his power, at his feet! The thought sent the blood, warmed by hot gin and water, spinning through his veins.

When he reached the cottage he found Mary sitting up for him—for he was late, and she eyed his flushed face rather curiously as he dropped into a chair and began to rub his ankle.

"Miss Lyra told me to say that the master was very low and restless to-night, sir, and that she wouldn't leave him, if you'd excuse her, sir."

And Mr. Chandos felt relieved; for, once or twice on his way home, the thought of meeting the direct gaze of Lyra's sad, lovely eyes had sent an unpleasant chill through him.

"Very well, Mary," he said; "quite right. But I hope

Miss Lyra will not be knocked up. You must help her all you can, Mary. By the way," he put his hand in his pocket and drew out a sovereign, "I want to give you a little present as an acknowledgment of all your kind attentions to me."

"Oh, Lor'!" exclaimed Mary, eying the gold coin reposing in her huge red palm. "Is all this for me? You be kind, sir."

"Not at all, my good Mary," said Mr. Chandos, benevolently. "I should have liked to have made you a handsome present, but I am—er—not a rich man."

"Lawks goodness sake, this is plenty!" said honest Mary.

"I'm glad you think so," said Mr. Chandos. "Er—Mary, I expect some letters. There is only one post a day, is there?"

"Only one, sir."

"Ah, well, perhaps you will bring the letters to me; I mean, bring them all, and I can pick out mine and give the rest to Miss Lyra."

Mary nodded unsuspectingly.

"All right, sir; I'm not good at reading writing hand. But it isn't many letters that come to the cottage."

Mr. Chandos was quite aware of that, but deemed it well to be on the safe side. There must be no communication between the Chesters and the outside world, if he could prevent it.

He paused outside the door of Mr. Chester's room on his way to his own, and heard Lyra's voice, low and soothing, as she spoke to her father. And then he went to bed, to lie awake and gloat in anticipation over his coming victory.

Lyra sat and watched beside her father through the long night, with an anxious, loving absorption which scarcely permitted of any thought of self.

"Love took up the harp of life and smote on all its chords with might,  
Smote the chord of self that, trembling, passed in music out of sight."

Once or twice the remembrance of what she had done, the promise she had made to this man, Geoffrey Barle, flashed across her, but though it made her shudder, there was no thought of drawing back. She would have laid down her life to save her father, why then should she hesitate to make the sacrifice which Geoffrey Barle demanded? What did it matter whether she was happy or unhappy, so that her father should end his days in peace and rest? Once the vision of Dane rose before her, but she put it from her firmly, resolutely. He had come into her life and gone again like a dream; she must never even think of him again, now that she was going to be the wife of another man. If she thought of Geoffrey Barle's

stipulation, that the marriage must be a secret one, that she must not tell a single person of their engagement, it did not seem strange to her, or unreasonable. What did it matter? Nothing mattered so long as her father was saved from this terrible trouble which had almost killed him.

Mr. Chester's condition was unaltered in the morning. He seemed dazed and confused, and scarcely conscious of anything going on around him; at any rate, quite indifferent. During the morning, Lyra ventured to allude to the anxiety that haunted him.

"You are not anxious, unhappy now, father, after—after what Mr. Barle said? The money will be paid now, and all will be well."

He looked at her vacantly.

"He did say so?" he said. "You are sure he said so? I thought that I might have dreamed it."

"Yes, yes," she said, earnestly. "You did not dream it; it is quite true. The money will be paid, and you need not worry yourself any more. Mr. Barle has been—very kind, father."

He nodded, staring vacantly beyond her.

"Yes, very kind," he assented. "Why is he going to lend us the money? Do you know?"

Lyra turned her pale face away.

"He—he is a friend, father," she faltered.

He sighed, but seemed satisfied with her reply, and presently sunk back and closed his eyes.

Lyra did not go down-stairs that day. She shrunk from meeting the man she had promised to marry. In a day or two she would be able to do so, would be able to thank him properly for all he was doing for them.

And Mr. Chandos was rather relieved by her absence, for he had rather a bad headache, and felt nervous and out of sorts, the results of the gin and water. He spent the day completing his plans; looked up the tidal trains in "Bradshaw;" went out to Barnstaple and bought some clothes and a nice traveling-trunk, and wrote to his bankers.

The next day, as he sat alone at breakfast, Mary brought him in some letters. There was one for Mr. Chester, in a business-like envelope, the contents of which Mr. Chandos guessed as he turned it over and over.

"Will you tell Miss Lyra that I should like to see her for a few minutes, if she can leave her father, Mary?" he said, blandly; and presently Lyra entered the room.



He rose and took her hand and held it, looking into her pale face with tender, respectful solicitude.

"My dear Lyra, how good of you to come down to me!" he murmured.

She slowly withdrew her hand, which he had not ventured to kiss, and went to the window.

"You sent for me," she said, in a low voice, the voice of a slave who has pledged himself to obey.

"How is your father this morning?" he asked.

"He is just the same," said Lyra, with a faint sigh.

"Ah! not well enough to be troubled with business matters?"

Lyra started slightly and turned her eyes, full of apprehension, upon him.

"No. Oh, no!" she cried. "He can not—what is it? Is there fresh trouble?" and her lips trembled.

"I am afraid so," he replied, gravely, sympathetically. "I see that there is a letter for him here. It looks as if it were on business. I fear it would not be wise to give it to him. Do you not think you should open it and learn its contents?"

Lyra took it and hesitated, but only for a moment. As she read it a faint cry escaped her.

"It is cruel, cruel!" she cried.

"May I read it, dearest Lyra?" murmured Mr. Chandos.

She held it out to him and turned away.

The letter was from Mr. Jarvin, who remarked that he had seen the drop of the shares, and that under the circumstances he felt compelled—as a business man—to curtail the fortnight's grace to that of a week; and that he should be extremely obliged if Mr. Chester could possibly pay him even before the expiration of that period.

Certainly chance was on Mr. Chandos's side.

"It is cruel!" he murmured. "But, Lyra, dearest, do not let it worry or distress you. Your father must not see this letter; it would make him ill again, perhaps dangerously—"

"No, no!" she panted.

He put the letter in his pocket and went to her and took her hand.

"Do not look so anxious, Lyra," he said. "It only means that this money must be paid at once, and it shall be paid."

She lifted her eyes to his gratefully.

"You—you will pay it at once?" she said, almost inaudibly.

"Of course I will," he said. "I have written to raise the money, and it will be here presently. Have no fear, Lyra."

When an Armistice—ahem!—a Barle pledges his word, it may be relied on to the hilt."

"Thank you. I—I can not thank you enough," she faltered.

"I do not want your thanks, I have yourself, dearest," he murmured. "Lyra," his voice sunk, and he glanced at the door to see if it was closed—"Lyra, I find that our marriage must take place at once."

"At once!" she echoed, not with a start, but with a dull kind of apathy.

"Yes," he murmured. "I may have to leave here at any moment. My uncle is not well. I told you that I am his heir, you remember? and I may have to go to him. You must not refuse if I ask you to be my wife soon, quite soon."

She shook her head.

"No," she said, quietly, in the same dull, helpless way.

He stroked her hand.

"My dearest Lyra, you quite realize that our marriage must be a secret one?"

She assented by a movement of her head.

"You have not told any one—any one of our engagement?"

She looked at him with a faint surprise at his question, and his eyes fell.

"No one?"

"No one," she said. "You asked me not to do so."

"Yes, yes! Dear girl! I asked because it is so important to me—to both of us—that no one should know. You see, I have to think of both our futures now. If our marriage were known it would mean ruin to both of us. I do not care for myself, but I am bound—it is my duty—to regard your welfare."

She did not speak, but listened in the same dull, half-confused way. She was thinking of her father only, the gray-haired old man whom she was going to save from further trouble.

"I have been making arrangements, dearest," Mr. Chandos went on, his eyes fixed on the shabby carpet, "and do you know I have hit upon what I hope you will consider a very happy idea."

She waited silently.

"This is my idea," he said. "You remember the day we went to St. Mark's?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, now, why shouldn't we be married there?"

He waited, but she was still silent, her sad eyes fixed on his shifty ones.

"It is a church, you know, and marriages take place there. Why shouldn't we walk over there one morning—to-morrow, say."

She started slightly, and a faint color crept into her face; but it vanished in a moment and left it pale again. Why should she hesitate?

"Well—the day afterward," he murmured, watching her closely. "I can get the license." He saw by her face that she did not understand. "But I need not trouble you with all that. You can trust me, Lyra, dearest?"

She looked at him with the same dull regard. Why should she not trust him? Incapable of guile herself, it never occurred to her to suspect him.

"A friend of mine, a—er—clergyman, a remarkably good fellow, will perform the ceremony. It will be the quietest wedding that ever took place, I should think. We shall just walk—or shall we row?—over to the church as if we were out for a stroll, the ceremony will be got through as quickly and quietly as possible, and then you can come back to your father and resume your loving care of him as if—as if nothing had happened. When he is better—and directly he knows that this money has been paid, directly he feels that this burden has been lifted from his heart, he will get better, dearest—"

"Yes, yes!" she said, with the first touch of interest; "oh, yes!"

"Yes. Then you consent, dearest?"

"Yes," she said, apathetic again. "I will take Mary. I can—can take Mary?"

Mr. Chandos started apprehensively.

"Er—er—Mary? I—er—think not, my dear Lyra. No, it would not be wise to take Mary. She is a good girl, a very nice, good girl, but I'm afraid she would not be able to keep her own counsel; and—er—it is important, it is seriously important that our marriage should remain a secret at present."

"I am to go alone?" said Lyra, shrinkingly.

"Why not?" he said, smilingly, but watching her closely.

"Ah, well—yes, I understand. Let me see. Ah, yes! the very thing. I will ask a lady friend, a relation of mine, to be present. That will do, will it not, dearest?"

Lyra assented with a sigh.

"Yes," she said. "It does not matter. And—and this money—my father—"

"Shall be paid before we go to church. I am only waiting



for it. I have had to borrow it, Lyra"—he turned his eyes away modestly.

She held out her hand to him.

"You have been very good, very kind," she said. "I will do whatever you wish."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"How can I express my love for you, my sense of your infinite trust in me, Lyra?" he murmured. Then as she left the room he sunk into a chair and drew a long breath. "The day after to-morrow," he breathed. "It is not long to wait."

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## CHAPTER XIX.

THE day of Lyra's sacrifice dawned sadly, as if in sympathy for her.

Up the valley of the Taw a gray mist drove before a drizzling rain. She woke with the plaintive cry of the curlews in her ears, woke with that awful sense of impending calamity which falls upon us in the first moments of waking.

Her sleep had been a restless one, haunted by dreams. At one time she saw herself standing beside Geoffrey Barle before the altar in the ruined church, with Dane, amidst the shadows, looking on with a sad, despairing face; at another she dreamed that her father and she were wandering homeless and friendless through the streets of a great city, followed by Geoffrey Barle laughing at and taunting them.

She rose with a heavy sigh, and went into the adjoining room where the old man lay.

He was asleep, and breathing so lightly that it looked almost like the sleep of death. She bent over him and kissed him, then dressed herself and went down-stairs.

Mr. Chandos was waiting for her. He too had slept but badly, and felt a certain shakiness which not even a stiff glass of whisky had succeeded in banishing; but he smiled tenderly and with a pretense of gayety as he took her hands and kissed them.

"Our marriage morn, dearest," he whispered. "I wish it were a brighter one; but love laughs at clouds, Lyra; and there will be no company with fine dresses to spoil. After all, such a solemn ceremony as a marriage should, I think, be performed in a quiet, solemn manner, and you are too sensible, too wise, to attach any importance to the usual fuss and excitement."

She withdrew her hands, and went to the table without a word.

He looked covertly at her pale, sad face.

"All the arrangements are complete," he went on, in a low voice. "My friend, the clergyman, will be at the church at eleven; we will go out as if we were going for a simple stroll, and—and it will be all over in a few minutes. Mary will look after your father, and he will scarcely miss you."

"You—you have the money?" asked Lyra, without raising her eyes.

He took out his pocket-book and tapped it.

"Yes, yes. You must not let that worry you any more, dearest. The money shall be paid to-day. I will send it directly after breakfast. By the way, I think it would be as well to send Griffith to Barnstaple, or further, if you can. He is always pottering about the place, and may suspect something, or happen to go near the church."

"Very well," she said, with a sigh. It was hard that she should have to deceive even the faithful Griffith, who had been almost a second father to her, who loved her so devotedly.

"You might send him to Barnstaple for some jelly, or wine, or something of that kind for your father," said Mr. Chandos. "He won't refuse."

"He would not refuse, whatever I sent him for," said Lyra.

Mary came into the room as she spoke, and Mr. Chandos hastened to dispose of her.

"Mary," he said, "I have persuaded Miss Lyra to take a little walk with me this morning; you will remain in Mr. Chester's room while we are away."

"Lawks! yes, sir," said Mary; "but what a morning for a walk. But there, Miss Lyra don't mind the weather, and it's time she went out."

Mr. Chandos smiled reassuringly at Lyra as Mary went out again.

"Everything goes well with us, dearest," he said. "There's Griffith outside; suppose we send for him and start him off?" and he went to the window and called Griffith.

He came in, taking off his rough fur cap, and looked from one to the other; but his eyes rested with anxious gaze on Lyra's pale face.

"Miss Lyra wants you to go to Barnstaple for some wine and other things for Mr. Chester," said Mr. Chandos, blandly.

Griffith glanced at him, then looked again at Lyra, who sat with downcast eyes.

"I can send in," he said. "I'm busy with the garden this morning."

"Miss Lyra would rather you went," said Mr. Chandos, still blandly. "Would you not?"

"Yes," said Lyra, her eyes still fixed on her plate. "Yes, Griffith."

"Very well," he said, with sullen obedience. "But won't you come with me, Miss Lyra? The walk would do you good."

Mr. Chandos colored.

"Miss Lyra can not leave her father; you forget, Griffith," he said.

"No, I don't," said Griffith, sullenly. "Why don't you go yourself? You can walk into Barnstaple this morning as well as you walked in the other night. You'd be of some use then."

Mr. Chandos flushed still more hotly.

"I—er—my ankle pains me this morning, my good Griffith," he said.

"You must go, Griffith," said Lyra, in a low voice.

Griffith assented by a growl, and Mr. Chandos penciled a list of articles required and tossed it to him. "You need not hurry back, Griffith," he said.

"Hurry or no hurry, what's that to you?" growled Griffith, half audibly, as he shuffled out of the room.

Mr. Chandos smiled when he had gone.

"That disposes of him," he remarked. "Really, Lyra, I don't see your need of this ancient and extremely disagreeable retainer.

Lyra looked up wearily.

"Need of Griffith?" she said. "He is most faithful, devoted—"

"Oh, I know," said Mr. Chandos, airily. "But never mind; we can discuss that later on. Be sure you are not late, dearest," he added, as Lyra rose; "we must not keep the clergyman waiting. That is a terrible breach of etiquette, you know."

Lyra made no response, but went up to her father's room.

He was awake, but lay almost as still as if he were asleep.

She knelt beside the bed, and took his thin hand in hers and clasped it.

"Are you better, father?" she murmured; and she wondered if her voice sounded as strangely in his ears as it did in hers.

"Better? Yes, yes," he said, in his weak, listless voice.

"I—I am going out for a little while with Mr. Geoffrey Barle," she said, after a moment. "You won't mind being left with Mary, father?"



"Going out—going away?" he said; and a faint expression of alarm and discontent came into his face.

"Not—not for long," she said, feeling as if she were choking. "I shall be back before you have missed me."

"No, don't be long," he said. "However short a time it is, I shall miss you, Lyra."

He was silent a moment; then, with his eyes resting vaguely on her, he said, as if to himself:

"You have grown very like your mother lately, Lyra. She was a beautiful woman;" and he sighed. "If she had only lived! But she was taken from me, and since I lost her"—he stopped and closed his eyes, but opened them a moment later—"you have been a good—a loving daughter to me, Lyra. I—I wish I could have made you happier; I wish I could have done for you what other fathers do. You have been buried alive here. It is my fault—my selfishness—"

"No, no, father," she said, chokingly; "you have nothing to blame yourself for. I have been very happy. We have been very happy, and we shall be happy again, now—now that this trouble has been removed from us. You know that it has gone, father; you know that this money has been—will be—paid. You heard what Mr. Barle said—you have not forgotten?"

He knit his brows as if he were striving to remember.

"The money—the money which Mr. Jarvin wanted?" he said.

"Yes, father."

"Yes, I remember," he said, but vacantly. "It will be paid, Mr. Barle said. It is very kind of him, but—"

"But what, dear?" she asked, pressing his hand.

He looked beyond her with a troubled frown.

"Lyra, I—I don't like Mr. Barle," he murmured.

Lyra shrunk back, then bent her face over the wasted hand.

"Mr. Barle has been very kind," she murmured, almost inaudibly. "He has been our friend—our only friend. Don't—don't say that, father."

"I don't like him," he repeated, with the weak querulousness of a child. "I don't feel as if I could trust him. Why should he lend—give us this money? I—I wish he would leave the cottage."

Lyra laid her face on his head and kissed him.

"You must not say that, father," she faltered. "But for him—"

She did not finish the sentence; but the old man did not appear to expect her to do so.

"Yes, he has been very kind," he said. "I—I do not understand it; but— Will you be gone long, Lyra? I miss you even if you are away five minutes. It is almost as if your mother were sitting there."

Lyra's eyes filled with tears as she got up and bent over him.

"Kiss me, father, for—for my mother's sake," she murmured.

He kissed her, then closed his eyes and sighed wearily.

Mary came into the room.

"Mr. Barle says as you're to get your things on, Miss Lyra," she said, in the audible whisper which is so aggravating to the sick.

Lyra stood for a moment or two holding her father's hand, then left the room.

It was raining still, and she put on her water-proof over her plain serge dress. Then she knelt beside her bed, and prayed a short, feverish prayer, not for herself, but her stricken father, for whom she was sacrificing herself.

Almost before the prayer had left her lips she heard Geoffrey Barle's voice calling her. She went down, the palest, saddest of brides, but outwardly as calm as a statue.

"It is all right," he said, taking her hand; his own trembled. "Mary is with your father, and Griffith has started. There is absolutely no one to see or interfere with us. Come."

Lyra followed him from the cottage. As she closed the gate after her she looked up at the window of her father's room.

"It is for you, for you," she murmured.

"What did you say?" asked Mr. Chandos, tenderly; but she did not reply. "The question is, shall we row or walk?" he said, as they went toward the beach.

"Let me row," she said.

They got into the boat and Lyra pulled down-stream. A strange, unnatural numbness seemed to have taken possession of her.

Mr. Chandos, with his coat collar turned up, sat shivering in the stern of the boat, though the weather was anything but cold.

With slow, steady strokes Lyra pulled the boat opposite St. Mark's. Mr. Chandos offered her his hand, and they landed.

"I expect my friend, the clergyman, will be there waiting," he said, with a dry cough.

"Will your cousin be there, too?" asked Lyra, listlessly.

"My cousin?" He had quite forgotten the promised cousin. "Oh, yes, I hope so; she said she would."

Lyra threw out the anchor, and they walked up the beach to the ruined church. As they approached it, Lyra saw a gentleman with a pale, haggard face standing by the door. He carried a small black bag.

"My friend, the clergyman," said Mr. Chandos, thickly. "Dear me, how cold it is. He is a remarkably nice man, my dear Lyra."

The remarkably nice man came forward at this juncture and raised his hat, and Lyra instinctively shrunk back from the haggard face and bleary eyes.

"This is Mr.—er—Green," said Mr. Chandos, with a sickly smile. "Is everything ready, Green?"

Rawdon, after a swift glance at the bride, a glance followed by a start of surprise and admiration, nodded.

"Everything is ready," he said.

Lyra looked round wearily, not suspiciously.

"Where is the lady, your cousin?" she asked.

Mr. Chandos coughed.

"Dear me, she is not here. Tut, tut! how annoying! But never mind, dearest, her presence is not necessary—not at all; is it, Green?"

"No," said Rawdon, in a husky voice; "not at all necessary."

He glanced at Lyra as he spoke; then, as her sad eyes met his, he looked away across the river; but he seemed to feel her eyes still on him, and eventually his own were fixed on the ground. He seemed possessed by a nervousness which appeared to communicate itself to Mr. Barle, for that gentleman looked up and down the river with an anxious, half-fearful expression.

Of the three standing there in the mist and rain, the unconscious victim was the calmest.

"Er—shall we go in?" said Mr. Chandos, breaking the silence which had fallen upon them. With trembling hand he drew out the key from the ivy and opened the door, and they passed into the church.

It smote chill and damp, and Rawdon shuddered visibly, and seemed to pause as he looked round. Mr. Chandos saw the momentary hesitation, dread, remorse, whichever it may have been, and tried to assume a confident and assured air.

"You've got your surplice in that bag, I suppose, Green?" he said, pleasantly, but in the subdued voice in which one speaks in a sacred edifice.

Rawdon nodded gravely.

"I—er—I suppose it really is not necessary," said Mr.



Chandos, glancing from one to the other; "but I think you would like Mr. Green to wear it, Lyra?"

Lyra was standing in the aisle, one hand resting on the edge of a pew, her eyes fixed with a sad, dreamy expression. At that moment the voice of Dane seemed sounding in her ears. She seemed to see his face in the duskiness round the altar. She started slightly, and turned to Mr. Chandos, and he repeated his question.

"As you please," she said, with dull indifference.

"Ah, well; better, perhaps," said Mr. Chandos. "If you will sit down for a moment, dearest, I will—er—help Mr. Green."

He beckoned Rawdon into a little curtained recess and gripped him by the shoulder.

"Quick, man!" he said, harshly. "Quick, and get it over; we may be seen, interrupted."

Rawdon started and shook off his hand.

"Who—who is she?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper. "She is a—a lady as well as beautiful. She looks ill, frightened. By Heaven! I've half a mind—" He put his hand to his brow and glared round him as if fearfully.

Mr. Chandos snatched the bag from him, opened it, and took out a surplice.

"Here, put it on," he said. Rawdon still stood staring about him. At the bottom of the bag was a flask.

Mr. Chandos, with a low exclamation of satisfaction, took it out, poured some of the contents into the cup, and pressed it into Rawdon's shaking hand.

"Drink, man," he said, "and let me take a drink, too. It's—it's the chill of this place that upsets one."

"That and—and the sight of her," murmured Rawdon, after he had gulped down the neat spirit. "She looks like an angel. Her face will haunt me as long as I live. God forgive us, Chandos!"

Mr. Chandos forced the surplice over Rawdon's head.

"Hush!" he said, warningly. "What—what nonsense you talk! I tell you she is here of her own free will. There—there has been no force. Quick, or she will wonder why we are waiting."

Rawdon, though the surplice was on, still stood gazing before him; and Mr. Chandos, as a last resource, pulled out his pocket-book, and extracting some bank-notes, held them up with a sickly smile.

"You see?" he said. "It's not bad pay for—for such a small piece of work. If you're sharp over it, you will have

time to catch the afternoon train to Southampton. Think of it, my dear Rawdon! You will be at Havre in no time. The steamer starts to-morrow night. You are off to fresh life, fresh hopes, prosperity. Come."

Rawdon walked up the aisle and took his place, and Chandos, very pale, and with a strange tightening of the lips, approached Lyra and offered her his arm. At the sound of Rawdon's voice, hollow and husky, Chandos started, and could not refrain from looking round; but Lyra seemed unmoved, and still possessed by the death-like calmness.

Chandos, as he put the ring on her finger, felt the hand he held strike like ice. His own was now burning hot.

Rawdon's voice died away with the last words of the service, and with bent head and eyes fixed on the ground he went with unsteady steps down the aisle and into the curtained recess.

Chandos followed with Lyra, and motioned her to a pew.

"Wait for a moment, dearest," he said. "I—I am going to get the certificate."

Lyra sunk into the pew. She did not know that she ought to sign the register; and if she had known, would not have remembered. She was in a dream, in which she still heard Dane's voice, saw his face.

Mr. Chandos found Rawdon leaning against a chair, trembling and shaking. The sweat stood in great drops upon his brow.

"It is horrible, horrible!" he gasped.

Mr. Chandos held the curtain tightly closed and glared at him.

"Pull yourself together, man," he said, angrily. "The thing's done now, your work's finished, and here are your wages." He thrust the notes into Rawdon's hand. "Get out of that thing and be off as quickly as you can. You must come and say good-bye, of course; and—and—for Heaven's sake try and look less like a corpse, or a man who is going to be hanged."

Rawdon shuddered.

"I—I—deserve to be hanged for this day's work, Chandos," he said, gloomily.

Chandos produced the flask again and thrust it into Rawdon's hand that held the notes.

"If you're so frightened, all the more reason for you making yourself scarce as soon as possible," he said.

He stuffed the surplice into the bag, and, raising his voice, said loud enough for Lyra to hear:

"So sorry you have to hurry away, Green; but as it is a

case of sickness we must not detain you, much as we should like to do so. I know how scrupulously you do your duty, my dear fellow."

He linked his arm in Rawdon's and led him out.

"Say just as little as you can, and, for goodness' sake, try and smile," he added, in a whisper.

Rawdon, with downcast eyes, stood before Lyra.

"I—I must wish you good-bye, Mrs. Barle," he said. "I wish you every happy—"

His voice broke, and his face grew deathly white.

Mr. Chandos cut in with a laugh that rang hollow and ghost-like in the quiet place.

"Thank you, thank you, my dear Green," he said. "Don't wait." He actually took him by the shoulder and turned him toward the door. "We will excuse you; I know how exacting a country parson's duties are."

Rawdon glanced over his shoulder at Lyra, then, without another word, walked down the aisle and out of the door.

Mr. Chandos waited a moment, then he took up the waterproof and put it over Lyra's shoulder.

"Come, dearest," he said—"my own wife."

For the first time since they had entered the place Lyra shivered.

"Are you cold?" he asked, tenderly. "It is chilly in here; poor Green noticed it. He—he is a great invalid, and was not at all well this morning."

"I am not cold," said Lyra, in the same dull, indifferent voice.

Mr. Chandos locked the door and hid the key in the ivy.

"Dear old church," he murmured, sentimentally. "So full of romance and—er—poetry. We could not have been married in a sweeter place. I shall always remember it, always. What are you looking at, dearest?" He broke off, for Lyra was gazing at the river, at a sand-bank just showing above tide.

It was the spot on which she had been stranded the day she saved Dane's life.

"Nothing," she said, turning her dreamy eyes upon him.

"Let us go back; my father may miss me."

"Yes, yes," he assented. "Ah, Lyra, you have a husband as well as a father now;" and he drew her arm within his; but he reflected that some one might see them, and dropped it suddenly.

They got into the boat and Lyra rowed up-stream. It was hard work, but it brought no color to her pale face. Rawdon



had called it the face of an angel; it was more like the face of a martyr.

"I wish I could help you, dearest," murmured Mr. Chandos, sweetly.

"You have helped my father," she said, with a wan smile. "You will send that money away directly, will you not?"

"Directly we get home, my own," he responded. "I am afraid you are getting wet."

"It does not matter," she said, absently; "I am used to it, and I have nothing on that rain will spoil."

She stopped rowing as she spoke, and her lips quivered. They were almost the same words she had spoken to Dane.

"No," said Mr. Chandos, tenderly. "It is not a very suitable wedding-dress for my dear one; but you shall soon 'walk in silk attire.' Lyra, I long for the time when I shall see you properly dressed, and in a sphere more worthy of your beauty and grace. Directly your father is better we will go to London, Paris—Don't you think he is well enough for us to leave him now?"

Lyra stopped rowing again, and a spasm of fear, of dread, shot across her face.

"Leave him?" she breathed—"leave him? Oh, no, no! You said—you promised—"

"All right, dearest," he said, promptly; "there is no hurry. I was only thinking of your happiness, pleasure—"

"I should not—could not be happy away from him!"

He lowered his pale-blue eyes, and an ugly smile curled his thin lips for a second.

How he would pay her for every such speech—presently, presently!

"You shall stay with her as long as you like, dear one," he murmured. "I am your humble, devoted slave, obedient to your lightest word."

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## CHAPTER XX.

THEY reached the landing in front of the cottage. Mr. Chandos looked round apprehensively, but no one was to be seen.

"Thank Heaven, that ruffian hasn't got back yet!" he said to himself, meaning Griffith.

Lyra put the oars back, and sat for a moment, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes fixed on the river.

"You are tired, dearest," he said; "let me help you out."

She just touched his hand with her small, cold one as she got out of the boat, and they walked up to the cottage.

As they entered, Mary met them at the door.

"Why are you not with my father?" asked Lyra, reproachfully.

"Master's all right, Miss Lyra," said Mary. "He's asleep—has been sleeping ever since you went, just like a child. We shall have him down again in a day, just like old times. Lor', how cold you looks, Mr. Barle!" she added, staring with round eyes at Mr. Chandos, who, what with excitement and the drizzling rain, was chilled to the bone. "You look as pale as if you'd seen a ghost!"

"I am afraid I *have* taken a chill, Mary," he said. "I think a glass of hot whisky and water would be a good thing."

Mary grinned.

"All right, sir; I'll get it."

She brought the hot water and whisky, and he mixed himself a pretty stiff glassful.

Lyra had gone straight to her father's room. He was, as Mary had said, asleep; and Lyra knelt beside the bed and laid her heavy, aching head on his arm.

She had saved him; she was married—married. It all seemed ghastly, unreal, and dream-like, and she could not realize it, though she tried to do so. The church, the haggard, care-worn face of the clergyman, even her husband himself, appeared phantasmal and visionary, a kind of night-terror.

She rose presently, smoothed her father's pillow, and taking off her wet water-proof, went down-stairs.

Mr. Chandos looked warmer; there were two hectic spots on his cheeks, and his pale eyes were restless and watchful.

They sat down to lunch, and though he made a pretense of eating, it was a pretense only. Lyra eat nothing, but sat looking out of the window, with the expression of apathetic indifference which had sat upon her face all through the ordeal.

Mr. Chandos eyed her covertly, and now and again a smile curved his lips. He would be patient with her for a day or two, a week perhaps, then he would show her that he was master.

She rose without a word when the lunch was over, and went upstairs again. Mr. Chester was still sleeping, and she sat beside him with her hands clasped in her lap.

Mr. Chandos helped himself to some more whisky, and the spots on his cheeks grew more hectic.

As he took long draughts of the spirit and water, he began

to ask himself why he should be patient, why he should wait. Why shouldn't he insist upon her leaving the cottage with him that night? She was his wife, his property.

He heard her come down the stairs, and hastily hiding the glass on the sideboard, forced a smile to his lips as she entered.

"How is he now, dearest?" he asked.

"He is asleep," she said. "I came to ask you about the money."

Mr. Chandos frowned and looked down.

"Asleep still? That is good, very good. I told you that he would get better directly this trouble was removed from his mind. The money? Why are you so anxious, dear one? Do you think—suspect—that I—" He stopped under the direct gaze of her guileless eyes.

"Suspect?" she said, as if she did not understand him. "It is only because I want to tell him, the moment he wakes, that the money has been sent, that he has no longer need to fear."

"Just so," he said; "very natural. I will send it at once. If you like, you and I will go and post it. Perhaps—perhaps"—he coughed—"we might—you see, he is so much better—we might take a little trip this afternoon. What do you say to going to Combe for—for a day or two?"

She looked at him with more surprise than alarm.

"And leave him? Oh, no, no; I—I could not. You will not ask me."

His face darkened sullenly.

"Really, my dear Lyra, I think you should—er—study my wishes a little. Remember that I am—er—your husband."

She stood looking at him with a growing sense of fear.

"I can not leave him," she said, simply, almost inaudibly, and went out.

Mr. Chandos got his glass again, swearing under his breath, and his face grew an unwholesome red.

Lyra went into the garden and sat in the arbor seat. The mist had thickened, the river was scarcely visible; and yet she saw it all so plainly, saw Dane swimming, sinking in the stream, felt his hair brush against her face as she lifted him into the boat.

She tried to shut out the vision, to put her thoughts from her; for was she not the wife of another man, the man who had saved her father?

She got up after awhile and wandered down to the water's edge. The tide had risen; through the mist she could see the coasting vessels floating up to Barnstaple. Some of them



would be going back to sea on the ebb. A wild longing to be out at sea in one of them, out on the wide sea, away from the hideous nightmare that weighed like lead on her heart, took possession of her.

Then suddenly she heard her name called, and turning, saw Mary running down the beach.

"Miss Lyra! Miss Lyra!" she was calling wildly.

A swift fear, a nameless dread, fell upon Lyra. She ran toward her.

"What is it, Mary? Hush! you—you frighten me!"

Mary, white to the lips, and with her round eyes distended with fear, clutched at Lyra's arm.

"Come—come at once, Miss Lyra!" she gasped. "The master—"

Lyra darted past her like an arrow from a bow, and ran up the stairs to her father's room.

He lay as she had left him, and there seemed no change in him; he appeared to be still asleep. But as she bent over him, something in the stillness of the face struck her. She bent lower, then threw herself upon him, as if she would pluck him from the hand of death. Mary, panting, tried to raise her.

"Don't 'ee, don't 'ee, Miss Lyra!" she cried. "It's no use. It's all over. Oh, dear, dear!"

For a minute or so Lyra held him in her arms, then she rose, and brushing the hair from her face, looked wildly, vacantly round her.

"When—when?" she gasped.

"I don't know, miss," said Mary, through her sobs. "I was sitting here quite still and thinking he was asleep, and presently I got up to draw back the curtain, and the light fell on his face, and—and I saw— Oh, Miss Lyra, don't look so!" she broke off, for the expression on Lyra's face terrified her.

Lyra sunk beside the bed and laid her face on the dead man's breast.

"Don't 'ee, don't ee!" implored Mary, putting her honest arm round the bereaved girl, and rocking her gently to and fro. "He's at rest now, Miss Lyra. He went in his sleep like a baby. He's happy now. Look at his face."

Lyra raised her tearless eyes and looked at the face. There was a peaceful smile on it; then she uttered a wailing cry. Mr. Chandos heard it, and, after a moment of startled listening, came up the stairs.

"What—what is the matter?" he asked; then he saw, and his flushed face went white.

"Oh, take her away! take her down-stairs! She mustn't stop here, or she'll go mazed!" cried Mary.

Mr. Chandos took Lyra's arm. To his surprise she offered no resistance; she was, indeed, incapable of it. He led her down-stairs and into the parlor, and put her into a chair.

"My—my dear Lyra, my dearest," he murmured, confused and bewildered. "You—you must try and bear up. You must not give way. Remember that, though your father has gone, you—you have me." The hideous mockery of the speech struck him silent for a moment. "Come, Lyra," he went on after a moment or two, "it—it is all for the best."

She looked straight before her, her hands clasped. She did not hear him. Suddenly, without moving her eyes, she said, hoarsely:

"The—the money, you have sent it?"

Mr. Chandos started, and a look of relief and satisfaction passed over his face.

"No—fortunately," he said, in a low voice, and with some surprise at her question at such a moment—

She raised her wild, bewildered eyes.

"Fortunately? You—you have not sent it?"

He nodded with increased satisfaction.

"No, dearest. I was just going to do so when I heard you cry out. It is most fortunate. Five hundred pounds is a large sum, and—er—worth saving."

She rose, steadying herself by the arm of the chair, her eyes fixed on him as if she scarcely heard, scarcely understood.

"The money!" fell from her lips, hoarsely. "The money you—you promised him!" and she extended her hand.

Mr. Chandos stared at her.

"Why—why do you talk of that now, dearest?" he murmured, soothingly. "Hush! be calm, Lyra."

He took a step toward her, but she put up her hand to keep him away.

"Give—give it to me!" she panted, almost inaudibly. "It was his—his! It was to save him from dishonor. He shall have it. Give it to me!"

He thought she was delirious.

"Lyra, Lyra, my dear Lyra!" he whispered, trying to take her hand.

She snatched it from him, and still clutching the chair, confronted him.

"It was to save him—it was for the money—that I did it!" she said, brokenly, but yet with a kind of fierce, desperate

persistence. "You—you shall not keep it from him. Give it to me that I may—pay—"

The voice failed, and she sunk against the chair.

Mr. Chandos, half angry, half frightened, approached her.

"My dear girl," he murmured, "you shall have the money—"

"Now, now! I want to tell him!" broke from her.

Chandos scowled.

"Be—be reasonable, dearest," he said. "What is the use of the money to him now. Why should we throw away, simply throw away, a large sum—"

She rose to her full height and scanned his face with a terrible gaze. Then, as she read his treachery and perfidy in his mean face and shrinking eyes, she shrunk back and uttered a cry of horror and loathing.

The cry stung Mr. Chandos like the thong of a whip. He caught her arm none too gently, and put his face close to hers.

"Lyra, you are half mad. But I—er—make excuses for you. Go to your own room. Come. Do you hear? I don't—don't—want to be angry at—er—such a time—"

He put his arm round her as if to take her from the room. She raised her hand and struck at him wildly, only half conscious, in her frenzy of grief and horror, of what she was doing, then staggered to the door.

Mr. Chandos, his face tingling and red, darted before her and locked the door.

"Wait—sit down!" he gasped.

She leaned against the wall, panting and wringing her hands.

"Let me go—to him," she breathed.

"Presently, when—you are calmer," he said, in a sullen whisper. "You are not in a fit state to be alone. Come and sit down."

He put his hand on her arm as he spoke. His touch seemed to madden her.

"Let me go!" she cried, putting her hands up against the door in a blind, pitiful way.

As if in answer to the appeal of her groping hands, the handle of the door turned, and Griffith's voice was heard outside calling her name.

"Griffith!" she panted.

The next moment the door was forced and Griffith was in the room.

She fell upon him, clutching him wildly.

"Griffith! oh, Griffith!" she cried; then she tore herself from his arms and staggered up the stairs.



Griffith stood, his gnarled face distorted with rage, looking more like a wild animal than a man.

"You—" he snarled as if he were choking, and advanced upon Chandos with his huge hairy fist raised.

Mr. Chandos looked round the room in a frenzy of terror.

"Wait—stop!" he said, hoarsely. "Don't—don't—hit me! Listen!"

Griffith edged round the table, breathing hard, and would have been upon him in another moment; but with one of those inspirations which come to men in moments of deadly peril and despair, Mr. Chandos overturned the table between him and his assailant, and with a cry of terror darted out of the door.

Griffith stumbled over the table, but regained his feet, and was in instant pursuit.

But by the time he had reached the garden, Mr. Chandos was not to be seen; the white mist, an impenetrable vapor, being over the whole scene.

Mr. Chandos, too cunning to run, and so betray his whereabouts by the sound of his footsteps, crouched down behind the hedge and listened to Griffith blundering about and breathing savage imprecations; then, white and trembling, stole away along the river-bank toward Barnstaple.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

MR. CHANDOS cowered behind the hedge until Griffith's footsteps and voice died away in the distance; then he rose, trembling and shaking like ague personified.

Most of your two-penny half-penny villains are cowards, and Mr. Chandos was no exception to the rule. He was possessed of one idea only—the desire for flight and safety. There had been murder in Griffith's eyes, murder in his voice and uplifted hand, and Mr. Chandos felt that if he fell into this man's clutches—whether it were now, or next week, or next year—there would be no hope for him.

Lyra would be sure to confide in Griffith; the vile trick by which Chandos had hoped to get her into his clutches would be discovered, and—well, Mr. Chandos remembered Rawdon's remarkable penal servitude, and shuddered like a half-drowned terrier. His terror drove all his passion for Lyra and his desire for revenge completely out of him. All he wanted was to get away—to put as great a distance between him and the mill cottage as possible.

"What a fool I have been!" he muttered, with sundry

oaths. "I must have been bewitched—must have lost my senses! Why, I may be overtaken at any moment, caught, and—"

He shivered and shook, and hurried on through the mist, scarcely caring where he went, so that every step lengthened the distance between him and the place he had suddenly grown to hate.

Every now and then he stopped to listen, dreading to hear Griffith's footsteps and hoarse voice; but all was still.

Presently he found himself at the beginning of Barnstaple quay. The station was not very far off, and he decided to go there, hide in one of the waiting-rooms, and slip into the first train for London.

"Then I'll go on the Continent, America—anywhere, for a time," he muttered. "Thank Heaven, I've got the money still; I've saved that, anyhow;" and he tried to chuckle, but the attempt was a failure.

As he felt his way along the quay—for the mist was still thick and heavy—he heard voices near him, and suddenly two men lurched up against him.

They were sailors. One was in his shirt-sleeves, and both were the worse for liquor. Mr. Chandos tried to avoid them, but the man without the coat caught him by the arm in a half-savage, half-affectionate grip.

"Halloo, ship-mate!" he said, lurching upon him unsteadily. "Where are you bound? Without your—hic—lights, too! You precious near run me and my mate down—didn't he, Jim?"

"So he did," assented his companion. "There's a—hic—fine for sailing without lights in a fog. Glass of grog all round—eh, Willyum?"

Willyum nodded with drunken gravity, and took hold of Chandos's other arm.

"Hear what my mate says, skipper? Right! Come along, then. There's a grog-shop round her somewhere, though blarm me if I haven't lost the bearings."

Inwardly fuming, Mr. Chandos smiled a sickly smile, and forced a still more sickly laugh.

"Stand a drink? certainly," he said, with mock cheerfulness. "Here's a shilling for you. I'm—er—I'm in a hurry, or I'd join you;" and he tried to free himself, but the man held him tightly.

"No, you don't," he said, with playful sternness. "You ain't a-going to cut your cable in that surly fashion. Just

you come along and see as we drink fair, or Willyum'll have more nor his whack, as usual."

"What d'ye mean by that insinuation?" demanded his companion, turning on him with drunken irritability.

"All right," responded the first. "Keep your temper, Willyum; anyways, wait till we've towed this stranger into port. Come along, mate;" and he began to haul Mr. Chandos back along the road that led to the cottage.

Mr. Chandos struggled and fumed, but he was like a child in the grasp of the burly sailor.

"What's the matter with yer?" demanded his captor.

"I'm in a hurry, my good man," said Chandos, feverishly.

"I have to catch a train—"

"Train be blowed!" retorted the sailor. "You don't want to catch no train. What you want is a glass of good hot rum to clear this fog out of your throat. What! would yer?" and his grip tightened as Mr. Chandos tried to slip out of his hands.

Mr. Chandos groaned. They were going back to the cottage. Griffith might appear on the scene at any moment. He must try strategy.

"Very well," he said, "I'll go with you; but—er—don't pinch my arm."

"Right you are; that's sensible," responded the man; and he slid his huge hand up to Mr. Chandos's shoulder.

The three groped their way along the quay, the two sailors lurching on either side of Chandos for some yards; then Chandos heard, or thought he heard, a rough, grating voice shouting. A cold sweat broke out upon him, and he shook. It must be Griffith, and he would be upon them in another minute.

Possessed by the demon of terror, he softly and gradually slipped his right arm from the sleeve of his coat—his captor's hand was on his left shoulder; then pretending to miss his footing, lurched against his neighbor.

"Hold up, mate!" cried Jim; then he uttered an exclamation of surprise and stared at his companion. "Why, I'm blarmed if he ain't given us the go-by, after all, mate, and left his coat behind him—like an eel!"

Willyum swore roundly at his friend.

"He's done you like a child, you chuckle-headed lubber!"

"So he have," admitted Jim, with a drunken voice; "but he's left his coat behind him."

"His coat!" commented Willyum, sarcastically. "What's the good o' that?"

"All depends on what's in it," retorted Jim.



"Give it here," remarked Willyum.

"Not if I knows it," hiccoughed the other. "It's my prize, mate."

They squabbled over the coat for a minute or two, and James finished the dispute by knocking his friend into the gutter, and then calmly got into the garment.

Mr. Chandos, meanwhile, ran on toward the station. He was half demented with fear, and he fancied he could still hear Griffith's voice. Suddenly it flashed upon him that he could scarcely travel to London in his shirt-sleeves, and he stopped short, panting and bewildered. As he stood, uncertain and hesitating, he remembered that his pocket-book, with the five hundred pounds, was in the pocket of his coat!

Yes, there was nothing for it; he must go back to the men and regain possession of his coat at all risks.

He retraced his steps cautiously, and reached the men as Willyum slowly picked himself out of the gutter.

"Oh, there you are, are you?" he exclaimed, confronting Mr. Chandos. "I'll teach you to play tricks on your betters, Jim! Come on!"

As he spoke he flung off his pea-jacket, and squaring his arms, advanced threateningly.

Mr. Chandos's teeth chattered in his head.

"Stop—wait!" he gasped. "It's—it's a mistake! I'm not your friend! I've—I've come back for my coat! I'll buy it of you! I'll—"

A drunken laugh came from behind him, and at the sound of it Willyum hurled himself forward.

Mr. Chandos sprung, with extraordinary nimbleness, out of the way, and the two friends collided.

Scarcely conscious of what he was doing, Mr. Chandos picked up the pea-jacket and gazed at them. There was a sound of a struggle, a drunken laugh of satisfaction, and then a heavy splash. Only one man stood in the mist on the edge of the quay.

Mr. Chandos uttered a cry of terror and sprung forward. Willyum was leaning over the quay, his hands resting on his knees, sailor-fashion.

"Man overboard!" he said, with drunken gravity.

"Great Heaven!" gasped Chandos. "He'll—he'll be drowned!"

"Drowned!" hiccoughed Willyum. "What, Jim? Not he! He can swim like a—a fish!"

Mr. Chandos peered into the misty depth. He could hear

the tide washing against the stone wall, but he could see nothing.

He laid a shaking hand on the sailor's shoulder.

"Are—are you sure he can swim—that he is quite safe?" he gasped.

"Sure as eggs," responded Willyum. "Let's go down to the grog-shop. I'll lay my life Jim'll be there afore us!"

Mr. Chandos seemed incapable of movement. He stood and stared into the mist beneath him, his teeth chattering, his hair almost on end. Suddenly he heard voices calling, from a vessel, as it seemed, and the sound roused him from his stupor of terror.

Without a word he turned and ran blindly toward the station.

It was not until he got into the light of the gas-lamps that he remembered the coat on his arm. With a shudder he put the rough thing on, and turning up the collar, made his way to the refreshment-room.

"Give me—give me a shilling's worth of brandy," he said, as cheerfully as he could. "This fog has nearly choked me."

The girl behind the bar served him with the spirit, and with his back to the light, Mr. Chandos disposed of it.

On inquiring at the booking-office, he learned that a train for London was due in thirteen minutes. Like a man in a nightmare, he took a third-class ticket—for it occurred to him that in his present attire he would be conspicuous in a first-class carriage—and kept in a quiet corner till the train came up.

What he endured during those ten or twelve minutes it would be difficult to describe; but, still like a man under the spell of a very bad dream indeed, he got into the carriage and sunk, with a groan, into the furthest corner.

He let himself into his chambers with his latch-key, in the gray of the summer dawn, and at once took off the hideous pea-jacket. He would have liked to have burned it, but you can not burn cloth without creating a smell which travels for miles, and the only way of hiding it that occurred to him was that of packing it at the bottom of a trunk full of old clothes.

He did this, and then threw himself upon the bed to rest and think. But the latter operation was not compatible with the former; for when he began to think, he realized his peril.

He had been guilty of the crime of perpetrating a mock marriage; that meant, if he were discovered, penal servitude; but in addition, it was not at all improbable, if the sailor was drowned, that he, Chandos, might be suspected and charged

with murder. Why, he had actually been seen wearing the man's coat!

Mr. Chandos stifled a cry in the bed-clothes, and then sprung up and changed his clothes for a traveling suit. If he were quick he could catch the tidal train for Paris, and thence go—well, anywhere—Spain, Mexico; any place where the extradition treaty was not in force, and he could escape his pursuers.

Leaving a penciled note on the table for his servant, to the effect that he should not be back for some time, he got into a cab and reached Charing Cross just in time to catch the tidal train. And it may safely be said that, of all the passengers who underwent the horrors of that short but cruel ordeal between Dover and Calais, Mr. Chandos Armitage was the most wretched.

Faint with hunger and seasickness, he hid himself for a night, a night only, in an out-of-the-way hotel in Paris, and left early next morning for Spain, a considerably sadder, perhaps a wiser, but by no means a better man.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

A WEEK later, Lyra stood at the cottage gate. An open letter was in her hand, but her eyes were fixed on the square tower of Barnstaple Church, and she was thinking of the dead father who lay at rest in his quiet grave. Even if she could have recalled him to life, she would not have done so, for she had come to know that her loss was his gain. He, at any rate, had been spared the knowledge that his child was married to a villain; for in that one moment when Chandos had shrunk from her searching gaze, she had read his miserable soul as plainly as if it had been an open book.

She had her out-door things on, and a small portmanteau was at her feet. Black makes even stout people look somewhat thin, and in her plain black frock of merino and simple bonnet, Lyra looked almost ethereal.

A man, a stranger—in fact, a man in possession—lounged at the cottage door, smoking a short clay, and presently Griffith, with a growl, pushed past him and came limping down the path.

Lyra turned to him with a sad smile.

"Is it nearly time, Griffith?" she said.

"Yes," he said, his gnarled face working with suppressed emotion. "It's nearly time, if you've made up your mind, and nothing I can say will alter it."

Lyra shook her head and laid her hand on his bent shoulder.



“No, Griffith,” she said, in a low but quite steady voice, “nothing. My mind is made up, and nothing can alter it. I’m afraid you think me very ungrateful, Griffith;” and she sighed.

“No,” he said, with a catch in his voice, “not ungrateful, but stubborn—stubborn, Miss Lyra. Why should you go out into the world while I’m left to work for you? I’ve enough money saved to buy new furniture. I can earn enough to keep us two—”

Lyra shook her head with a gentleness which was more convincing than any fervent refusal.

He looked up at her with mournful scrutiny.

“Sometimes, since I heard of this whim of yours—for it is a whim, Miss Lyra—I’ve thought that there was some other reason for your going. I’ve wondered if that fellow, Mr. Barle, had anything to do with it. I’ve asked myself if you was afearred of him.”

Lyra turned her head away and shuddered slightly.

“I am not afraid of Mr. Barle, Griffith.”

He gnawed at his thumb nail, eying her sadly, anxiously.

“There’s something between you and him that I can’t make out, Miss Lyra,” he said. “What had happened that you and he should be quarreling that day the master died?” His voice dropped. “You’ve never told me, and I’m not quick enough to guess. Won’t you tell me—Griffith—Miss Lyra, dear?”

She looked straight before her for a moment, then she turned her sad eyes upon him.

“No, Griffith, I can not tell you. You promised not to ask me, you remember? I could not tell you or any one. He has gone; he will not come back.”

“If he only would,” he said, between his teeth. “Miss Lyra, I mistrusted him from the first. He was like one of those brown adders you see in the sand-hills. I wish he’d broken his neck that day he fell from the cliff.”

Lyra sighed.

“Don’t let us talk of him for the few moments we have to spend together. You mean to stay here, Griffith?”

“Yes,” he said, doggedly; “I shall stay here, Miss Lyra. The rent isn’t more than that of a laborer’s cottage, and I can earn it. I’ve grown fond of the place. But that isn’t all. I feel that some day you may—well, you may want to come back”—he looked at her eagerly; and Lyra, feeling the glance, suppressed a shudder—“and if you do, why, here I shall be, and here will be a shelter for you. Yes, Miss Lyra, dear, I shall stay here. I’ve had work promised me, and I

can buy a bit of furniture— But all that's nothing. What becomes of me doesn't matter; it's you, *you*, my dear mistress—”

His voice broke and he turned away.

Lyra forced a smile.

“Why, Griffith,” she said, cheerfully, “I shall be all right. I am a very fortunate young person. You told me when I answered the advertisement that there were hundreds, hundreds wanting the situation, and that I should have no chance; but you see I have got it.”

Griffith grunted discontentedly.

“Situation! The word galls me. You, a Chester, going out into a situation!”

Lyra laughed. It was only the shadow and semblance of her old laugh.

“Why not?” she said. “No one who is poor ought to be too proud to earn their own living; and, somehow, Griffith, I think I shall be happy and contented, the lady writes so frankly and kindly”—she glanced at the open letter in her hand—“and there is so very little for me to do; and that is fortunate, for there is so very little I could do.” She sighed. “All the other people that advertised wanted me to know French, and German, and mathematics, and I don't know what else. But Mrs. Leslie says that I shall only be required to read aloud and answer letters. Oh, I am very lucky, if you would only believe it, Griffith!”

“Lucky!” he snarled. “You who are a lady, having to read aloud and answer letters!”

She let her hand fall on his shoulder again, and said, soothingly:

“I might have had to do worse and harder work, Griffith. I might have had to teach a lot of children things I didn't know myself,” she laughed. “That would have been very bad. But I am used to reading aloud. You remember how I used to read to—to”—her voice broke—“my father; and I can carry on a correspondence.”

He shook his head and growled.

“If you'll only say the word, you could stop on here at the cottage—”

“And be a burden to you,” finished Lyra. “No, no, Griffith; I could not do that. But I am glad you are going to stay.”

“And you promise, if anything happens—if you don't like this—place”—he stumbled over the word as if it were a nau-

seous draught—"that you'll come back—any time, without notice? I shall be here, glad and joyful to welcome you."

"Yes, yes," she said. "But isn't it time we started, Griffith? Wait a moment for me."

She went into the house and passed through the untidy rooms, in which the furniture was already marked with the odious labels, "Lot" so-and-so, and up to her father's room.

She knelt beside the bed for a few moments, then went out again, the man in possession staring at her in a wooden, unsympathetic fashion.

Griffith stood by the gate, with the portmanteau on his shoulder, and, almost in silence, they walked along the river-side to the station.

There a surprise awaited Lyra, for on the platform was Mary, who had been dismissed with a month's wages in lieu of notice.

The tears were in her eyes as Lyra approached, and the honest, tender-hearted girl threw her arms round Lyra's neck and gulped out her farewell.

"If I could only go with you, Miss Lyra, dear!" she sobbed. "You were always so kind and good to me!"

Griffith would have shouldered her away jealously, but Lyra retained the girl's hand until the train was on the point of starting.

However, Griffith had the last word.

"Remember, Miss Lyra," he said, hoarsely, "there's a home for you at the mill cottage whenever you want it. And—and you'll write to me?"

Lyra's eyes were blinded with tears—the first she had shed since her father's death—as the train puffed out of Barnstaple Station, and she cried gently and silently in her corner for a greater part of the journey. The West of England Express is a good train, and a little time after five it steamed into Waterloo.

Lyra got out, and was making her way through the crowd, when a footman in rich but subdued livery approached her and touched his hat.

"Miss Chester?" he said.

"Yes," said Lyra; "I am Miss Chester."

"The carriage is waiting if you will follow me, miss, please. I will see to your luggage."

"There is no luggage but this," said Lyra, indicating the portmanteau, at which he tried not to look surprised.

She followed him to a landau drawn by a pair of magnificent



horses, and the footman opened the door for her and shut her in with grave respect.

The carriage made its way over Waterloo Bridge and through the crowded Strand to the West End, and stopped at one of the houses in Carden Square. Lyra, like most persons, had read a great deal about London, but never in her dreams had she been able to imagine anything like the reality. The endless rows of houses, the handsome, richly dressed shops, the interminable line of vehicles, the throngs of human beings of all ranks of life crowding the pavements amazed and bewildered her.

Suddenly, to find herself in a quiet square, and in the large and richly appointed hall of this huge palace, was like an unexpected shock, the falling over a cataract into the still depth beneath.

The footman ushered her upstairs into at what she at first thought must be the drawing-room, so richly was it decorated and furnished, but which, as she learned afterward, was only a *boudoir*.

She sunk with a feeling of strangeness and solitude into one of the softly padded seats and waited—an interminable time, as it seemed to her; then the door opened, and a lady entered the room.

She was a middle-aged lady with a very pleasant countenance, which wore an apologetic smile as she came forward with extended hand.

"Oh, Miss Chester!" she said. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

After much consideration and painful self-questioning, Lyra had decided to retain her maiden name.

Lyra rose and murmured something inaudibly, and the lady scanned her face with gentle and kindly interest.

"Of course you know who I am?" she said. "I am the Mrs. Leslie with whom you have been corresponding."

"Yes," said Lyra.

At the sound of her voice a faint look of satisfaction shone in Mrs. Leslie's eyes, and she drew a little breath of relief.

"I am afraid you have had a long and wearisome journey," she said. "Will you go to your room and take off your things? It is only on the first floor. Come, I'll show it to you, and then we will have some tea."

She led Lyra to what was really one of the small rooms in the large house, but one that looked to her, used to the tiny cottage, a spacious apartment exquisitely furnished.

"Ring the bell for anything you want. My maid will wait upon you. You are sure you can find your way down?"

Lyra took off her hat and jacket and enjoyed a good wash, then went down to the *boudoir*. The rose-tinted blinds were drawn to exclude the fierce rays of the evening sun, and a dainty tea-service was on one of the marquetry tables, with Mrs. Leslie reclining in an easy-chair before it.

"How quick you have been!" she said, giving Lyra one of those swift glances of approval of which only women are capable.

"Have I been so quick?" said Lyra, ingenuously. "I thought I had been a long while."

Mrs. Leslie laughed.

"Why, my dear Miss Chester, most girls take at least half an hour to get their hats and cloaks off, and you have not been ten minutes. It is easy to see that you have lived in the country."

"Yes," said Lyra, "I have lived in the country all my life. I have never seen London until to-day."

Mrs. Leslie smiled her surprise.

"Really? But you must not think you have seen it even now," she said; "for you have not seen the best of it; nearly the worst, indeed. Do you think you shall like it? But don't be alarmed. I may as well tell you before you answer the question that we do not live in London for very long, and that we are just on the point of leaving it. We go to Castle Towers to-morrow."

"To Castle Towers?" said Lyra, vaguely.

Mrs. Leslie nodded, then paused in the act of filling Lyra's cup.

"How stupid of me!" she said. "I haven't yet explained the real facts of the case. I suppose you think that I am—well, your employer?"

Lyra colored faintly.

"I—yes, I thought so," she said. "You are Mrs. Leslie?"

"Oh, yes," said that lady; "but I am only a servant like yourself, if you don't mind the word. I don't."

"Nor I," said Lyra, but rather wonderingly.

Mrs. Leslie laughed approvingly.

"It is an honorable term enough," she said. "We are all servants of some one. Why, even the Prince of Wales is not too proud to wear as his motto 'Ich Dien'—'I serve.'"

Lyra smiled.

"I am not proud," she said.

Mrs. Leslie glanced at the pale, beautiful face rather doubtfully.

"I am glad of that. But I think you are. You have proud eyebrows. We are all proud, really; only we deny it most eagerly. But you are wondering who your—shall I say employer—is. She is a lady of much greater importance than I am. Have you ever heard of Lady Hainault?"

Lyra shok her head.

"No," she said. "But that goes for nothing. I have heard of no one. All my life I have lived in a country place far away from anywhere, and I know, have heard of no one." Mrs. Leslie looked at her thoughtfully.

"I was going to say 'poor child!' but I will alter it to 'fortunate!'" she said, with a smile and a sigh. "I envy you your quiet life. I am sure it must have been a happy—" she paused, as Lyra winced. "Oh, I beg pardon, my dear! I did not know—I forgot;" and she glanced at the black dress.

Lyra fought with her tears and mastered them.

"I have been very happy till lately," she said, simply, "until I—I lost my father."

"Poor girl!" murmured Mrs. Leslie. "I understand. Forgive me, I know what that means. I am not too old to remember my own loss. I, too, was left alone in the world." She paused. "But I have suffered more even than you, my dear; for I lost a dearly loved husband."

Lyra's face went white for a moment. Fortunately, Mrs. Leslie's eyes were cast down, and she did not notice the spasm of terror that passed across the beautiful face.

"But about our 'mistress,'" and she laughed. "The lady to whom you have engaged yourself is Lady Hainault, the late Lord Hainault's daughter and heiress. I am an old friend of hers, as well as her servant, and until now have been her companion and amanuensis—that is, reading and writing machine. How fond we all are of long words, especially if we think they conceal something derogatory to our dignity; but my eyes have been rather weak of late—or I fancy they have, which is quite the same thing—and Lady Hainault, instead of getting rid of me, and exchanging me for a more serviceable person, chooses to consider me indispensable, and engages some one to help me. There it is in a nut-shell. Your duties will consist in reading aloud whenever you are required—and you will be required to do so very often, and to read most abominably dry stuff, too, my poor child!—and you will have to write Lady Hainault's business letters."



“Business letters?” said Lyra, with faint surprise.

Going by her knowledge of titled ladies—knowledge derived from three-volume novels—she thought they did no business whatever.

Mrs. Leslie laughed.

“Oh, yes. Lady Hainault does an immense amount of business,” she said. “I don’t mean that she keeps a bonnet shop and millinery establishment, like some of the ladies of the nobility.”

“Do they—do they keep a shop?” said Lyra, with surprise.

“Oh, dear, yes!” said Mrs. Leslie, coolly; “a number of them; and very good businesses they have.” She mentioned some titled dames. “Poor things! they have lost their fortunes, what with bad speculations, defaulting trustees, and the drop in the value of land, and they are obliged to do something. Dig they can not, to beg they are ashamed, and so they take to bonnet-building. But Lady Hainault hasn’t come to that yet. All her business is of a philanthropic kind. She is a great social reformer—wants to make the working-man give up drinking beer and beating his wife, and tries to persuade the wife to keep the home cleaner, learn cooking, and wash the children.”

“And does she succeed?” asked Lyra, greatly interested.

Mrs. Leslie shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, partly. At Castle Towers the people are supernaturally good. But then they all pay less than their proper rent, and are mostly coddled like children in arms. Here, in London”—Mrs. Leslie laughed—“well, that’s a different matter.”

“And is Lord Hainault as philanthropic?” asked Lyra, after a pause.

“Lord Hainault is dead.”

“She is a widow, then?” said Lyra.

Mrs. Leslie stared at her, then laughed rather ruefully.

“Oh, I see; you meant her husband. I’m sorry to say Lady Hainault isn’t married. I wish she were. She would have plenty to do in reforming her husband, and it wouldn’t be so disappointing, perhaps,” she added, naïvely. “But you must not jump to the conclusion, from what I have said, that Lady Hainault is—well, a foolish and credulous person. She is really very bright and clever, and very lovable. The only fault with her is, as I have told”—she stopped—“told a friend of hers, that she is too good.”

Lyra smiled.

“I did not think any one could be too good,” she said.

"No. Wait until you know Lady Hainault, my dear. You will see her to-morrow—that is, if you are not too tired to travel."

"To-morrow—not to-night? Oh, I shall not be too tired. I am very strong."

Mrs. Leslie looked at her.

"You do not look too strong, my dear," she said, gently. "But we will try and plant some roses in those lily cheeks of yours when we go into the country. Yes, we will go to-morrow. Did you think Lady Hainault was here? How stupid of me not to tell you! She is at Castle Towers. She only comes up occasionally, though this, the town house, is kept going till quite the end of the season."

Lyra looked round.

"Lady Hainault must be very rich," she said, more to herself than to Mrs. Leslie.

"She is," assented that lady. "More's the pity. And now, my dear, you shall go and lie down till dinner-time. We will dine here instead of in the great room down-stairs, and to-morrow we will go to Castle Towers. That is, if you are well enough."

That night Lyra lay awake till the great London clocks boomed the small hours, wondering if she were herself, and if the great house and the new life she had entered upon were not a dream instead of a reality.

After breakfast—a luxurious breakfast, served in the *boudoir*—the carriage came round, and the two ladies started.

The footman engaged a first-class compartment for them, purchased a bundle of magazines, pulled down the blinds, and carefully arranged the small bags and wraps, and touched his hat in response to Mrs. Leslie's "Thank you, James." The guard came up and touched his cap, and in deferential, respectful tones asked if they were comfortable and had all they wanted. It was difficult for Lyra to realize that only yesterday she had come up to the same station in a third-class carriage, seated between a farmer who eat sandwiches noisily and a girl who sucked oranges.

Mrs. Leslie, in a hundred little ways, showed the kindness of her disposition, and insisted upon Lyra lying down for the greater part of the journey.

"You look tired, my dear," she said, "and no wonder! Now, just do as I tell you; and you must try and drink a little of this wine. You don't like it? I know; most girls don't. But you must try it, all the same—take it as medicine. Why, if you arrived at Castle Towers looking jagged and worn out,

Lady Hainault would never forgive me! You have no idea how kind she is."

"She can not be kinder than you," said Lyra, with moist eyes; and as she lay back and closed them, she was conscious of a guilty pang of self-reproach.

What would this warm-hearted woman say or think if she knew the truth—knew that the girl whom she was treating as a child was deceiving her—was not "Miss Chester," but a married woman?

When Lyra and Mrs. Leslie reached the station, a carriage and pair as handsome as those which had awaited them at Waterloo stood at the station; a footman was in attendance, and treated them with the profound respect which his fellow in London had accorded them; and they drove through the country lanes to Castle Towers.

Lyra had never seen a nobleman's mansion before, and she gazed with frank amazement and admiration at the great house, with its wide-stretching terrace and flower-spangled lawns.

"How beautiful it is!" she said, almost unconsciously.

Mrs. Leslie smiled.

"Isn't it? I'm glad to hear you say that, for I am almost as fond and proud of it as if it were my own. Whereas, Lady Hainault doesn't value it at a pin's point; in fact, she thinks, I believe, that it is almost wicked to own it while there are so many poor people living in hovels. This is the avenue—planted by Richard, Earl of Hainault, in 1443. This property was not entailed, and Lord Hainault, the late earl, left it to his daughter. But if you think the exterior beautiful, I don't know what you will say of the interior. We"—she laughed—"you see, I talk as if I were part owner—we have some of the finest and oldest oak carving in England."

The carriage stopped at the grand entrance; a footman helped them to alight, and they entered the hall. A small and girlish figure came out of one of the rooms, and a soft, low, but grave voice exclaimed, as the owner kissed Mrs. Leslie:

"You have got back, then, dear?" Then she turned to Lyra, who stood, rather pale and timid, a little apart. "How do you do, Miss Chester? I hope you are not tired;" and she held out her hand.

"Of course she is tired," said Mrs. Leslie, with a kindly smile. "She has spent the last two days in the horrid trains, my dear Theodosia."



At the sound of the name Lyra started, and the faint flush which had risen to her face faded away, and left it pale again.

Theodosia! The name brought back the remembrance of Lord Dane with the suddenness and keenness of a knife thrust.

Lady Theodosia looked at her with grave but gentle alarm.

"I can see that you are tired," she said, in her low, sweet voice.

Lyra tried to speak, but no word would come. The great hall, the two gracious ladies, had faded from her sight; she saw only the stream up the valley, and the tall, stalwart figure of Lord Dane.

Lady Theodosia signaled to a maid standing under the gallery.

"Take Miss Chester to her room," she said. Then as Lyra, with bent head and still dazed eyes, followed the maid, Lady Theodosia said:

"What a lovely girl, Fanny! but how pale and fragile she looks."

"Yes, poor child!" said Mrs. Leslie. "Her beauty startled me quite as much as it has startled you. I don't think I ever saw a lovelier face; and she is grace itself, isn't she? I think I have secured a treasure for you. But we must be very careful of her. The poor child has just lost her father—only a week ago. Think of it!"

"Oh, dear!" murmured Lady Theodosia, compassionately.

"And I fancy there was trouble—money trouble—before that, though she has said nothing. Indeed, she is very reserved and reticent, like all who have suffered. I don't think, from what I can glean, that she has a friend in the world."

"She will have two now," said Lady Theodosia, simply.

"That's like you, dear," said Mrs. Leslie, kissing her. "I think you will get very fond of her. I have taken to her tremendously already, though there is nothing brilliant about her, thank Heaven! It is wonderful how innocent of the world she is. She had never seen London till yesterday. In fact, she is just an unsophisticated, unaffected child, with the sorrowful heart of a woman."

"A woman with a history?" said Lady Theodosia.

"I—I don't know. No, I don't think so. How should she have 'a history'? She is too young. No, I think her only trouble is the death of her father and her terrible loneliness."

"At any rate, she shall be lonely no longer," said Lady Theodosia, very quietly.

The footman brought the tea into the drawing-room where they were standing. Lady Theodosia filled a cup and left the room with it, saying over her shoulder:

“You can pour out your own, dear.”

The maid had offered to help Lyra remove her things and unpack her portmanteau, but Lyra had gently declined, and, left alone, had gone to the window and looked out dreamily, thinking of the name she had heard—Theodosia.

A knock came to the door and she opened it, to find Lady Theodosia standing there with the cup of tea in her hand.

“May I come in?” she said, as if she were the newly engaged companion, and Lyra the mistress.

Lyra opened the door wide, and Lady Theodosia entered.

“I have brought you a cup of tea,” she said, lifting her clear brown eyes almost timidly to Lyra’s large, sad orbs. “Will you let me stay while you drink it? I know what it is to arrive in a strange house and feel lonely. Let me help you take your hat off. Why, how tall you are!”

Lyra looked at her, and as she looked the tears welled into her eyes and fell on Lady Theodosia’s sleeve.

Lady Theodosia took no notice, even when a sob escaped Lyra’s lips.

“Drink your tea. I wonder why a hat always makes one’s head ache? There, now.”

She smoothed Lyra’s beautiful hair from her forehead, and gently forced her into a chair. “Sit down and finish the cup. I will fetch you another, if you like.”

Lyra tried to drink the tea.

“Oh! no, no!” she said; then she broke down and hid her face in her hands. The outburst lasted only for a moment, and relieved her overstrained nerves; and presently she looked up at Lady Theodosia with a world of self-reproach.

“I—I am ashamed,” she faltered.

“Ashamed of being tired?” said Lady Theodosia, with a smile. “Then we should, all of us, be very often ashamed of ourselves. I know exactly how you feel, and I ventured to come up to you because I knew. But I will go now, and you must rest. You need not come down to dinner unless you like.”

“Thank you, my lady,” said Lyra.

Lady Theodosia made a little grimace.

“Oh! please no!” she said. “Call me Lady Theodosia. What is the matter?” she asked, for Lyra’s face had paled again suddenly. “I want you to understand at once—it is always best, is it not?—that I desire that we should be friends.

You have come to help Mrs. Leslie, who is my dearest friend. Will you tell me your name—I mean, your Christian name?"

"Lyra," said Lyra, in a low voice. Her heart was throbbing under this unexpected kindness.

"Lyra," repeated Theodosia; "it is a musical name in two senses of the word. I wish mine were as pretty; not that one should be discontented," she added, with a touch of her natural gravity. "Well, you shall stay upstairs to dinner, but you must come down afterward, for I think it will be better for you than remaining here all alone. You would feel solitary and neglected."

"You are very kind," was all Lyra could say.

Lady Theodosia smiled up at her as she rose. "You *are* very tall," she said again, and added, mentally, "very graceful. You must make haste and get strong again. You have been ill, have you not?"

"N-o," said Lyra. "Yes, I think so."

Lady Theodosia understood.

"We must teach you to forget your trouble," she said, in a low voice. "Good-bye. I will send for you after dinner. We shall be quite alone. If there is anything you want, ring that bell by the book-case; it communicates with my maid's room, and she will answer it."

Mrs. Leslie was still in the drawing-room when Lady Theodosia returned.

"Well?" she said.

Lady Theodosia was silent a moment.

"I am not surprised at your 'taking to her,' as you call it," she said, thoughtfully. "She has fascinated me. It is absurd, of course," she added, quickly. "One should guard against such sudden prepossessions and prejudices, I know; but—well, one can not always help them. I suppose it is her beauty and that mournful look in her eyes. What color are they?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Leslie, with a laugh. "If you were a man, I should say you had fallen in love with Lyra Chester, Theo."

Lady Theodosia echoed the laugh; then she said, gravely:

"He would be a very insensible man who would not fall in love with her."

Lyra changed her black serge traveling-dress for one of soft cashmere, which she had provided for evening wear; and shortly after she had done so, the maid appeared with a dainty dinner on an antique silver salver, which a footman had carried to the door for her. There was a glass of burgundy



among the other things, and the maid said, as she put it beside the plate:

"Her ladyship says you are to be sure and drink the wine. You are to take it as medicine, miss. You will ring for anything else you want, miss."

She put Lyra's things in the wardrobe, and "tidied up" the room with deft noiselessness before leaving, and Lyra felt that the kindly spirit of the mistress had imparted itself to the servants.

She tried to eat the dinner and drink half the glass of wine, then went to the window and looked at the sunset, which was throwing red gleams over the ancient park and broad meadows, her heart almost aching with its sense of the kindness of these new friends Providence had raised up for her.

Then she made a tour of the room, viewing the luxurious furniture and appointments with a kind of wonder. Like most of the guest-chambers in Castle Towers, this they had given her was furnished half as a bedroom and half as a sitting-room. There was a dainty little writing-table, a well-stocked book-case of rosewood, a great bowl of flowers, easy-chairs, and a couch; a combination of comfort and luxury common enough in the houses of the rich, but strange and wonderful in Lyra's eyes.

While she was looking over the titles of the books, the maid knocked.

"Her ladyship says that if you are quite rested, will you come down? I am to show you the way, miss."

"I am quite ready," said Lyra; and she followed the girl down the great stairs and across the hall into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Leslie was seated by the window, and Lady Theodosia, who was at the piano, playing softly, motioned Lyra to a seat near her.

"Are you fond of music?" she asked, continuing to play. "But I am sure you are. Do you sing?"

Lyra hesitated, and Lady Theodosia went on, with a laugh:

"Everybody says 'No' to that, as a matter of course."

"I have had no lessons; I'm afraid I don't sing," said Lyra. "But I will try, if you wish."

"Not to-night, certainly," she said, with a smile. "You are too tired. I will sing to you instead."

"Will you have the lights?" asked Mrs. Leslie.

Instinctively, Lyra rose to ring the bell, but Lady Theodosia stretched out her hand and kept her in her seat.

"No, dear. It is pleasant in the gloaming, and I know the song. We will have lights when the tea comes in."

She began to sing "The Star of Bethlehem" in a sweet though not powerful voice, and Lyra leaned back with half-closed eyes, and listened with a grateful sense of rest and peace.

Lady Theodosia paused after the first part.

"You like it?" she said.

"Yes," said Lyra.

"It is a great favorite of mine, but it wants a man's voice."

"It wants Dane's," said Mrs. Leslie, with a half laugh, and so quietly that Lyra did not hear her.

Lady Theodosia blushed slightly and frowned a little, then went on with the song. Suddenly she stopped and looked round.

"Who is that?" she asked.

Mrs. Leslie looked up listeningly.

"Well, I thought I heard a man's voice," she said.

As she spoke the door opened and a footman announced:

"Lord Armitage!"

Lyra, looking like one in a dream, saw a tall figure in evening-dress enter, and heard a voice—*his* voice—say:

"Halloo, Dosie! I thought you eschewed the ways of darkness. Where are you and which are you?"

And he looked round the dim room, with a laugh.

Lady Theodosia rose and glided toward him.

"Is that you, Dane? Why did you not come to dinner?"

"Yes, why didn't you? We had lobster cutlets," remarked Mrs. Leslie.

"Really?" he said. "Perhaps there are some left."

Was she asleep and dreaming? It was his voice, and yet—yet there was a difference. The words were light enough, but the light-hearted ring in the tones were absent. Oh, surely she must be dreaming! As she gazed at him, her lips apart, her heart seemed breaking with its wild throbbing, the room spun round with her.

He came toward her, walking by Lady Theodosia's side, and presently he saw her.

He stopped short.

"Why—who is this?" he said, in a low voice of faint surprise.

Lyra rose unsteadily and grasped the back of the chair.

"It is Miss Chester," said Lady Theodosia, in her even voice. "Miss Chester, this is Lord Dane Armitage."

Dane started, then took a step forward.

"Merciful Heaven!" broke from his lips; then, as she staggered, he caught her in his arms.

Mrs. Leslie hurried forward at his wild exclamation.

"Oh, poor child, poor child! she has fainted," she said. "Give her to me, Dane. Help me with her to the sofa there."

He held her for a moment, gazing wildly at the white, lovely face lying against his breast, then raised his eyes to the other women with a fierce refusal.

"Leave her to me!" he said, hoarsely; then he mastered himself, and carrying her to the sofa, laid her down.

There was not light enough to see his face, or it would have told its story—to Mrs. Leslie, at any rate.

"Poor girl!" she said. "Ring for the lights, Lord Dane, please; and I think you had better go and have a cigar in the library."

He did as he was told, and went out like a man walking in his sleep.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

LYRA came to in a very little while, and looked up at the two women and around the room with a dazed expression, which gave place to one of fear as she remembered Lord Dane's presence.

Neither Lady Theodosia nor Mrs. Leslie had the least suspicion of the cause of her sudden swoon, and both were full of sympathy for her.

"Are you better?" asked Lady Theodosia, putting her arm round Lyra to support her.

"My dear child, you have almost frightened us out of our lives," said Mrs. Leslie. "Are you given to fainting in this way?"

Lyra shook her head.

"I have never fainted before in my life that I remember," she said; then she looked round the room and sighed deeply. Was it a dream, or had she really seen and heard him?

"It was the long journey and the excitement of novelty," said Lady Theodosia, pityingly. "We ought to have sent you to bed directly you came; but I thought it would be better for you, less lonely, to spend the first evening with us."

"You have given Lord Dane as bad a fright as you have given us," remarked Mrs. Leslie, with a smile. "I never saw him so startled; but men are always such babies in the presence of a fainting woman. It was fortunate that he happened to be standing near you, or you would have fallen."

Lyra hung her head. It seemed to her that she had em-



barked upon a course of deceit and concealment from which there was no escape.

"I must go," she said, almost to herself; "yes, I must go."

"To bed?" said Lady Theodosia. "Of course you shall. Do you think you are able to walk yet?"

Lyra rose, trembling.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "I am all right now."

"Give me your arm," said Lady Theodosia, in her quietly commanding way. "I shall never forgive myself for letting you overtask yourself so much."

They passed out into the hall, and there stood Lord Dane. His handsome face looked grave and troubled, and his hands were plunged in his pockets, as is the way with men when they are anxious and disturbed. He took them out, and after a momentary hesitation, approached them.

"I—hope you are better," he said, in a low voice.

Her eyes met his for a moment, then fell.

"Yes," she said, almost inaudibly.

"Miss Chester has been traveling for two days and is not strong," said Mrs. Leslie.

"I—I am sorry to have given so much trouble," murmured Lyra, and her lips quivered.

He took her hand and drew it through his arm.

"I will help you up," he said; and with Lady Theodosia on the other side and Mrs. Leslie following, they went up the stairs.

"I will get some sal volatile," said the latter lady. "I have some in my room;" and she hurried along the corridor. A moment afterward she called out: "I can not find it. Have you any, Dosie?"

"One moment," said Lady Theodosia; and she ran to her room, and left Lyra and Dane alone.

He stood looking at her downcast face in silence for a moment, then he spoke.

"I can not ask you now one of the questions that are troubling me," he said, in a low, hurried voice. "I can scarcely believe that it is you who are standing here. For God's sake, do not tremble so; it is—it is as if you were afraid of me."

"I—am—not afraid," she said, without lifting her eyes.

"Heaven knows you have no cause to be," he responded, sadly. "They are coming. I will be here to-morrow. I must see you—have some talk with you. Meet me—will you meet me?"—his voice grew imploring—"in the rose garden?"

"No, no!" she said. "I must go—I must leave here."

"You must *not*!" he retorted, almost sternly. "The door at the back of the hall leads to the rose garden; I will be there at eleven."

"I can not—I can not!" she said, almost inaudibly.

The two ladies came down the corridor, and Mrs. Leslie took Lyra's arm.

"I will take charge of her. But I think she is quite well now. Are you not, dear?"

"Quite," said Lyra. "Good-night"—she looked at Lady Theodosia, not at Lord Dane—"and—and thank you."

Mrs. Leslie was kindness itself, and dismissing the maid, herself helped Lyra to undress.

"You will be all right in the morning, my dear," she said, "and we shall all be laughing at your sudden collapse."

Lyra scarcely spoke a word—if she had, it would have been to say, "I must go!"—and Mrs. Leslie soon left her and went down-stairs.

Lord Dane and Theodosia had gone into the library, and he was smoking vigorously as he leaned against the mantel-shelf, his head bent, his eyes fixed on the carpet.

"Poor Lord Dane!" said Mrs. Leslie, with a laugh. "Well, you can't say that we often make a scene for you. I am sorry for her. Think what it must be to find one's self among strangers—"

Dane bit his cigar. Should he confess at once that he was no stranger, that he and Lyra Chester had met before? He opened his lips, then hesitated. After all, it was her secret. He had no right to speak.

"She is the nicest girl I ever met," went on Mrs. Leslie. "As I told Dosie, I think we have got a treasure. Poor child! she has had a great trouble lately."

Dane looked up.

"She has lost her father."

Dane turned his face away. Lost her father! Poor Lyra! His heart ached, ached with love and pity.

"I know I shall grow quite fond of her," went on Mrs. Leslie.

"Don't you think she is very beautiful?" said Lady Theodosia, in her grave, thoughtful way, as she leaned back in the rocking-chair.

Dane puffed at his cigar. He felt mean and deceitful.

"I—I scarcely saw her," he said.

Mrs. Leslie laughed.

"A woman never looks at her best when she is fainting, whatever the novelists may say, Dosie; wait until Miss Chester

gets some color in her cheeks, and a brighter light in her eyes."

"Oh! I think her very beautiful now," said Theodosia, simply.

Dane flung the end of his cigar into the fire-place.

"Anyway," he said, "she has fallen among friends."

"Yes," said Theodosia; "I am sure I shall like her. Are you going?"

He nodded.

"Yes; I rode over with a message from the gov'nor; I'd almost forgotten it."

"And little wonder," laughed Mrs. Leslie.

"He wants you both to come and dine with us the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, thanks; we shall be delighted," said Lady Theodosia.

"I suppose we may bring Miss Chester; that is, if she is well enough?"

"Oh, certainly," he said. He rang the bell—he was almost master at Castle Towers—and ordered his dog-cart, shook hands with the ladies, and strode out.

"I may be over to-morrow," he said, over his shoulder.

"Lord Dane behaved very well," said Mrs. Leslie. "But, then, he always behaves well."

"Does he?" said Lady Theodosia, with an absent smile.

"Yes, I suppose it was rather trying for him; to be introduced to a strange girl one moment, and have to catch her in his arms the next. What was it he said as he caught her; did you hear?"

"No, I didn't," replied Mrs. Leslie. "I dare say he swore; most men would have under the circumstance;" and she laughed.

Lyra lay awake a greater part of the night. Fate had been against her, and thrown her and Lord Dane together again.

There was only one thing to do: to go away as quickly and quietly as possible. As she lay tossing from side to side, she reminded herself, again and again, a hundred, a thousand times, that she was married; that even if Lord Dane had not been engaged to Lady Theodosia, she, Lyra, was not a free woman. She was married to a man, base and vile, mean and despicable, but still irrevocably married. It was hard, it was cruel of Fate, but she must bow to the inevitable.

She fell asleep at last, a dream-haunted sleep from which she woke pale and weary.

And as she woke she remembered the appointment Lord Dane had made. Should she keep it? She decided she would



not. What good could come of it? A gulf, a dark gulf yawned between her and him, and nothing but death or dishonor could bridge it. She would make some excuse and leave that day. But where should she go?

When the breakfast-bell rang the maid brought in a daintily laid tray, and soon afterward Mrs. Leslie entered the room.

"I see you are better without asking," she said. "There is nothing like a good night's rest. Now, mind, you are to keep quite quiet all day. Lady Theodosia and I are off almost directly to a meeting; my poor child, you will learn all about these meetings presently;" and she laughed. "Lie in bed if you can, but if you can't, just wander about the house till we come back."

Lyra sighed.

"I—I was going to ask Lady Theodosia to let me go," she said.

"Let you go? Go where?"

"I don't know," said Lyra, simply. "But I feel, I know, that I—"

"Oh, nonsense!" broke in Mrs. Leslie, in her outspoken way. "You mustn't talk of going. Do you think because you are weak and ill that Lady Theodosia, or I, for that matter, want to get rid of you? My dear child, you will be all right in a few hours. There, don't talk nonsense; but take care of yourself till we come back. We shall be in to lunch. I should get out into the garden and just wander or sit about in the shade; it is a lovely garden."

Lyra sat for an hour with her head bowed on her hand, trying to decide what she should do. If Lady Theodosia had not turned out to be *the* "Theodosia," if Lord Dane had not appeared on the scene, how happy—well, if not happy, for happiness seemed to have fled from her forever—how contented and at peace she could have been!

Still undecided—for the question "Where should she go?" could not be answered—she at last went down-stairs.

The sun was shining brightly through the hall, with its family portraits and great porcelain vases, men in armor, oaken chests, and subdued velvet hangings, and she saw the glass door leading to the rose garden. It was open, and the scent of the flowers came in, accompanied by the humming of "innumerable bees" and the music of the birds.

She went into the drawing-room, but she could not remain there. She seemed to still see him as he came across the room, hear his voice. Yes, oh, yes! she must go!

She was making her way back to her room to pack up her

things, when she heard a step—his step—on the terrace, and he came into the hall.

He was dressed almost as she had seen him first, his stalwart figure looking more than its height in the suit of Harris tweed and doeskin gaiters.

He did not see her for a moment where she stood, almost hidden behind a vase, and she saw him look round with an expression of constrained eagerness. Then he caught sight of her, and came to her, with his hat in his hand.

“Are you better?” he asked, in a low, anxious voice.

“I am quite well, Lord Dane,” she said, very slowly, and as steadily as she could.

She was resolved that there should be no more weakness on her part. Whatever she might suffer, she would show no sign of it.

“I am glad—very glad,” he said. “I was afraid that you would be ill this morning. You still look pale and—and weak. Where are you going?” for she had moved toward the stairs.

“To my room,” she said. “I—I am going away, Lord Dane. Lady Theodosia and Mrs. Leslie are out.”

He took no notice of this piece of information.

“Wait,” he said, gently enough; but there was a tone of command, the man’s masterful ring, under the gentleness, which stayed her steps. “Do not go away until I have spoken to you. I ask it earnestly, humbly. I know you have no reason—far otherwise—to listen to any request of mine; I know how you must regard me; but I ask—I humbly ask you to listen to me, Ly—Miss Chester.”

She hesitated, and he caught at his advantage.

“Come into the garden,” he said. “We may be overheard here. Come; I will not keep you many minutes, and after our talk, if you still want to go, well—”

He sighed.

He opened the garden door for her, and they passed out. He glanced at the brilliant sun, and took a Japanese sun-shade from the stand to shelter her. The little act spoke volumes.

The rose garden, now in its glory, was the loveliest spot Lyra had ever seen, even in her dreams. She stood looking round her a moment, taking in the beauty of the flowers, the sense of her own misery. Dane pointed to a seat, and she sunk into it. He gave her the sun-shade.

“The sun is hot,” she said; and she tried to thank him.

He stood beside her looking down at her. In his eyes, in his heart, she was the loveliest, the *one* woman in all the

world; and yet he could not take her by the hand and draw her to his heart and claim her.

"Tell me how you come to be here," he said, at last.

She nerved herself to answer steadily, almost coldly:

"I saw an advertisement and I answered it. I did not know." She paused. "It was Mrs. Leslie who wrote to me and whom I saw. I did not know that it was Lady Theodosia to whom I was engaged."

"I understand," he said, in a low voice. "But—but why was it necessary?"

Her lips quivered, but she answered bravely:

"My father—"

"I know," he said. "They told me last night. I had not heard of it."

"It was not likely that you would," she said, simply. "When he died, I was all alone in the world, and poor. There was nothing left."

"No friends?" he said.

"None," she replied, quietly, "except Griffith. He is staying on at the cottage; he will live there. No, there was no friend. I was all alone and had to work—"

She stopped suddenly as she remembered Geoffrey Barle, stopped and shuddered slightly; and yet she had spoken the truth, for the vile wretch had gone. She had been alone in the world.

His heart ached for her. He turned his face away.

"I answered the advertisement, and the clergyman—the Vicar of Barnstaple, who—who buried my father—gave me a testimonial. He was very kind. He said I was very fortunate in obtaining a situation, and I should have been if—"

"If I had not appeared," he said, gravely.

"Perhaps I shall be able to get another," she said, calmly. "I will go back to the cottage and wait."

"No," he said; "you must not go back. Listen to me, Lyra." He stopped and bit his lip. "I beg your pardon. Miss Chester, I do not ask you to forgive me for—for what has passed between us. I—I was mad that day up in the valley there—" His voice dropped sadly. The vision of those few happy hours rose before him as they rose before her. "Knowing that—that I was not a free man, I should have kept silence. I had no right to say what I did. Miss Chester, I am engaged to marry Lady Theodosia."

"I know that. I think I knew it the moment I heard her name, saw her," she said, her eyes fixed on the rose-tree in



front of her, a magnificent Gloire, bowed down with its weight of blossoms.

"We were betrothed almost in our cradles," he went on, like a man who has a bitter, bad task before him, but means to get through with it at any cost; "our fathers arranged it; we ratified it, but I—I forgot it—God forgive me!—that day up the valley. I behaved like a coward, a cur, but"—he looked at her, at the lovely eyes, with their sad, intent gaze at the roses—"but I was sorely tempted. Until that day—that moment—I did not know what love meant; I did not know that I had a heart in my bosom."

Lyra's lips trembled.

"I—I—can not listen," she said, with a little pant.

"You are right. Do not go," for she had made as if to rise. "I will not say anything of that sort again. I will try and not be selfish, though I am a man. I don't want to think of myself, but of you."

He was silent a moment, gnawing at his mustache; then he went on:

"You say that you are all alone in the world, without friends?"

For one second—one only—Lyra was conscious of an impulse, a desire, to tell him of Geoffrey Barle—her husband. But this impulse lasted only for a moment. She could not bring herself to tell him of that mean, base bargain, which Geoffrey Barle had broken directly she had sacrificed herself. Indeed, why should she tell Lord Dane rather than any other stranger? He was nothing, could be nothing, to her.

"Yes," she said, almost inaudibly.

"But you have found friends—both Theodosia and Mrs. Leslie like you; I don't wonder at that. They would have hearts of stone if they did not. Why should you go?"

"Ah, yes; I must go," she murmured.

"No," he said; "I do not see that. I have done you quite injury enough. Why should I be the cause of further suffering? You want to go because I have turned up here, because you think we must meet frequently."

She turned her face away.

"That is it, is it not?" he said. "Merciful Heaven!" he broke out, losing his self-possession for a moment. "Why was I—I—who lov—was I fated to bring you unhappiness? Ly—Miss Chester, you must not go. You have found a home, friends. You must not add to my misery, my remorse, by leaving them. See, now"—he grasped the arm of the seat; it cost him something to refrain from touching her, from put-

ting his arm round her. "You must not fear me. Great Heaven! you are *not* afraid of me, are you?"

"Afraid? No," she said, in a low voice.

"Well, then, why should you go? You will see very little of me. I can go away, I can go abroad—"

He saw by her face that this argument was a bad one.

"Oh, no, no!" she said, still in the same sad murmur. "You would leave her because I am here. I should be keeping you from her, from Lady Theodosia."

He gnawed at his mustache and strode up and down the narrow path.

"You are right," he said. "I—I am a coward and an idiot. You are quicker than I am, see further than I do. Well, then, I will not go abroad. But I will not come here often. Theodosia is used to long spells of absence," he smiled bitterly. "But when I am here we—you and I—need see very little of each other. I say this for my sake. I am not such a conceited fool as to imagine that you—you bestow a thought on me, after—after—now that you know I belong to another woman."

He looked straight before him; but if he had looked into her face he would not have been able to read anything there. She was schooling herself, and was learning to keep her eyes from showing her heart.

"I am nothing to you, I know that," he went on, after a pause. "Why should I drive you away. Lyra—Miss Chester, don't go, don't add to my misery. As it is, my punishment is almost more than I can bear. I won't answer for myself if you leave here, and I have to go about knowing that I have driven you into the cruel world without a friend."

She was silent, but her lips trembled.

"See here," he said, and his voice grew hoarse and husky.

"You and I can never be anything more to each other; Fate has been one too many for us; but"—his voice broke for a moment, then he continued with a fierce eagerness—"but we can be friends. Great Heaven! there can be such a thing as friendship between men and women, though the world laughs at the idea and makes a mock of it. Lyra, you forgive me?" he demanded, suddenly, and he bent over her.

She raised her eyes to his almost for the first time.

"Forgive?" she said, sadly. "There is nothing to forgive, Lord Dane."

"Nothing!" he said, with a bitter laugh. "There has been enough to keep me awake night after night, enough to make me wish myself dead. Lyra, they say if you save a man's life

you will live to rue it; that sooner or later you will come to wish that you had let him die. You saved my life—”

“Oh, no!”

“Yes, and yes! Do you think I forget? And a pretty return I made for that life! Nothing to forgive! I wish you had let me sink in the Taw that day!”

She shuddered.

“Do—do not go back to that!” she faltered, piteously.

He mastered his emotion.

“You are right,” he said, sadly. “I must not go back; I have to forget it. It is a devil of a hard lesson, but I’ve got to learn it. But you say you forgive me? Well, then, grant my request, my prayer. Let me think that you really mean what you say; prove it by staying on here.”

“Will nothing less satisfy you?” she said, in a tremulous voice. “Better let me go.”

“No, no!” he said. “If—if you go”—he stopped for a moment, then went on vehemently—“then, by Heaven, I go, too! If you go, I will follow you. I will break my word, my vow; I will cast honor to the winds; I will—”

He had drawn closer to her, and let his hand fall on her shoulder. Lyra shrunk back and looked up at him.

“No, no!” she breathed. “You must not, you can not! I—I—”

Her face grew white.

“Well, then,” he said, with suppressed passion, “make up your mind. Stay here, and let us be friends. I will never say one word to remind you—to—to offend you. I will let the past go as if it had never been. To the world—the outside world—we will be as strangers; only you and I shall know that a tie—a tie of the warmest, closest friendship that ever existed between man and woman—binds us. Never by word or look will I remind you of the past or offend you. Stay, Lyra—Miss Chester—don’t add to my punishment. Stay”—for she had opened her lips—“stay!” and his face grew white. “It is not for your forgiveness alone that I plead, but for my honor.”

“Your honor?”

“Yes. I swear that if you leave here, I will break off my engagement with Theodosia!”

She looked at him with white face and alarmed eyes.

“Oh, no, no!” she breathed. “It—it would be of no use.”

“I know that,” he said, bitterly—“I know that you do not care for me, that you do not love me. If ever you might have learned to do so, the knowledge of my treachery—God



forgive me!—would have crushed out any fondness you might have had for me. I know all that; but all the same I would break my vow, I would break off this engagement—”

“Oh, stop, stop!” she panted, her head sinking on her bosom. “If you only knew! It is I who ought to ask your forgiveness. It is I—I!” The tears started in her eyes and blinded her for a moment. Then she looked up at him, though she could scarcely see him. “It—it shall be as you wish, Lord Dane,” she said. “I—I will stay. But—but remember that the past is dead and buried. You do not know all—you can not guess—” Her voice broke and she was silent a moment. “If you did, you would know that we never could, never, never, be anything more than friends.”

“I am content,” he said, with a kind of suppressed passion.

“Let me call you friend. Let me know that the past is wiped out, that I have your forgiveness, that I am not in your eyes the beastly coward and traitor I am in my own—”

“In the garden, did you say?” said a grave, clear voice at this moment.

Dane started and looked round.

“It is the parson,” he said, and gnawing his mustache, he stood upright as an arrow.

Lyra looked up. A tall, thin young man in clerical garb was coming up the path.

“Good-morning, Lord Dane,” he said; then he stopped and raised his hat to Lyra.

Dane eyed him rather grimly and sulkily.

“This is Mr. Martin Fanshawe, Miss Chester,” he said.

The Reverend Martin glanced from one to the other in his grave, almost stern fashion.

“How do you do?” he said. “Lady Theodosia sent me to look for you, Miss Chester. I don’t think she knows you are here, Lord Dane.”

Dane lugged a cigar from his pocket and lighted it.

“Been to some meeting, I suppose?” he said, rather gruffly.

“The committee meeting of the Society of Clear-Starchers,” said Mr. Fanshawe, gravely.

Lyra got up and went toward the house, and Dane kept Mr. Fanshawe talking for a few minutes, then followed with him.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

BOTH men stayed to lunch. Mr. Fanshawe and Lady Theodosia did nearly all the talking. Lyra sat silent, scarcely listening, and Dane was silent also. He eat his lunch—there

were lobster cutlets—in a preoccupied fashion, and now and again he glanced at the beautiful face opposite him.

What a cross-purposed jade Fate was! There sat the woman he loved, and who, he thought and felt, might have loved him—there she sat, silent and sad, perhaps thinking of him. And there, near her, was the little woman he was going to marry; and though she might love him, she certainly was not thinking of him, for all her attention was given to the tall, thin young clergyman who talked glibly and gravely of clear-starchers, Dorcas societies, mothers' meetings, cottage-garden clubs, and the parish Sunday-schools. She appeared so absorbed in all those important topics as to have forgotten Lord Dane's existence.

After lunch she rose.

"I think we might make out those lists," she said. "Lyra"—she looked at Lyra hesitatingly—"do you feel well enough to help us? Are you sure?" For Lyra had answered "Yes," with quiet promptitude. "At any rate, you might sit in an easy-chair and listen. You could pick up a great deal of the work that way. You are going to smoke a cigar on the terrace, I suppose, Dane?" she said to him, over her shoulder, as she left the room.

"I don't know," he said, carelessly. "I've got a kind of an idea that I'm interested in the work, also. I fancy I'll come—that is, if I may do the easy-chair part likewise."

"Oh, come, if you like!" she said, indifferently; but Mr. Fanshawe frowned slightly.

They went into the library, and Lady Theodosia took her seat at the table. Mr. Fanshawe produced a bag of books, and they fell to.

Lyra stood near the window for a time; but presently Dane, who had been staring at the book-shelves, pushed a chair toward her.

"Sit down," he said, in a low voice.

At the same moment Lady Theodosia looked up. Her face was eager, and her eyes wore an expression of concentration. It was evident that she was wrapped in her work.

"Miss Chester, will you copy this for me? That is, if you are sure you are well enough," she added, kindly enough.

"Yes," said Lyra; and gladly she took the paper to a side table.

She had not been writing many minutes before a shadow fell on her paper. Lord Dane was standing over her.

"Can you make it out?" he said, in a low voice, though

there was no occasion for it, for the other two were too absorbed to notice him.

"Oh, yes," she said.

He picked up the copy.

"I'll read it out to you," he said. "You'll get on faster that way."

"No, thanks," she said, a faint color coming into her face; but he ignored her refusal.

"Ready? Right; off we go. What is it? Report of the Visiting Committee? Humph! Ready?"

"The committee have distributed two thousand four hundred and sixty-one tracts during the last six months, and visited one hundred and sixty-four homes. They regret that in many cases they were received with anything but a warm welcome, and that their attempts to brighten the homes of the poor were often met with repugnance and discourtesy.' Some of 'em got a brick at their heads, I suppose. Not surprised. Wonder how *they'd* like Bill Stumps to march into their houses while they were at dinner, and ask them how much wine they drank, and how often they washed their babies? Some of these days that's what will happen when the 'working-man' gets the upper hand, and, by George! it can't be long first."

He had raised his voice and disturbed the other two.

"What *are* you talking about, Dane?" demanded Lady Theodosia, a delicate line on her smooth forehead.

"I am dictating the report to Miss Chester," he replied, blandly. "Endeavoring to make myself useful, am I not, Miss Chester?"

His eyes forced hers to rise to them. There was a light in them, a boyish joyousness which had been absent since—well, since he had left her that morning weeks ago.

"I—I can do it without the dictation, my lord," she said, quietly.

"There you are, you see!" he exclaimed, laying down the report. "If I try to be good, I don't get any encouragement. I might just as well have been outside with a cigar."

Yes, there was a touch of the old boyish and light-hearted gayety in his voice. The line in Lady Theodosia's forehead deepened.

"Why do you make a jest of it, Dane?" she said, in her low, grave voice. "Life is real; life is earnest," she quoted.

He looked at her gravely; the smile had vanished from his face.



"Yes, it's real and earnest enough," he said; and his eyes rested for a moment on Lyra's head as she bent over her task.

He opened the French window as he spoke, and went out on to the terrace.

Lady Theodosia sighed.

"I am afraid you will think Lord Dane very frivolous, Miss Chester," she said, in a tone of regret and apology. Lyra looked up, but said nothing, which was just as well, perhaps, for he came sauntering back to the window, a cigar in his mouth.

"Mr. Fanshawe," he said.

That gentleman looked up with knit brows.

"What is it now, Dane?" asked Lady Theodosia. "Mr. Fanshawe is very busy."

"So I see. I won't interrupt him for long," he said, with mock meekness. "I was only going to ask him if he will come over and dine with us to-morrow."

Lady Theodosia looked surprised and—well, yes, rather pleased. Mr. Fanshawe only looked surprised.

"Thank you, Lord Dane," he said, coldly. "To-morrow?" He thought for a moment. "I have a young woman's catechism class to-morrow, otherwise I should—"

"Bring 'em with you," said the irrepressible Dane.

Lady Theodosia frowned outright.

"My dear Dane, if you would only be serious!"

"Never more serious in my life," he said. "Nothing would give the gov'nor more pleasure."

"You might put off the class for once," suggested Lady Theodosia to Mr. Fanshawe, in a confidential, business kind of way.

"Do you think so, Lady Theodosia?" he hesitated.

"Oh, you'd better come," said Dane. "Look here; if you're all good, I'll drive over and fetch you in the break and drive you home again. It will be a lovely night. There will be just enough of you. Mrs. Leslie, you, Dosie, Miss Chester, and Mr. Fanshawe."

Lyra looked up, a faint color on her face.

"I need not go. I will stay at home," she said, in a low voice.

Dane was on the point of bursting out with a remonstrance, but wisely held his tongue.

"Oh, but you must go!" said Lady Theodosia. "I think the drive would do you good. You are feeling quite well now, are you not?"

Lyra still hesitated. She could feel Dane's eyes were watch-

ing her, though he appeared to be engaged in closely examining his cigar.

"Better come, Miss Chester," he said, at last; and with an affectation of polite indifference. "My father expects you all, and does not like to be disappointed."

"Very well; thank you," she said, and bent over her work again.

"All right," he said, as if the matter were settled. "I'm off now. Don't disturb yourselves, any of you."

He nodded to them all generally, but his eyes lingered longest on Lyra.

Lady Theodosia sighed.

"Poor Dane! He is just like a great school-boy," she said, almost to herself.

And Mr. Fanshawe, with his earnest eyes fixed on her, echoed the sigh.

Perhaps she would not have called him a school-boy if she had seen him as he went down the drive on his big chestnut; for there were the heavy lines of doubt, perplexity, and a man's restless, unsatisfied longing in his handsome face.

"So near, and yet so far!" he muttered, with something like a groan. "Oh, my love that never can be mine!"

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## CHAPTER XXV.

LYRA would willingly have avoided the visit to Starminster. What right had she to join the pleasures of her mistress? Why should she, the companion, the amanuensis, be invited to dine with the Earl of Starminster?

But when she ventured, the next morning, as she was writing letters at Lady Theodosia's dictation, to say that she was quite willing to stay at home, Lady Theodosia put aside the suggestion with a wave of the hand.

"Why should you not go?" she said. "You seem quite well and strong again."

"Yes; I am quite—quite well," said Lyra; "and I am very strong."

"Very well, then," said Lady Theodosia, as if that settled the matter. "I know what your objection is based upon. You think that Lord Dane only asked you out of politeness, as a matter of courtesy, and that because—well, because you are acting as my—shall we say secretary?—you would be *de trop*."

"Yes," said Lyra.

"Well, that is all nonsense. Forgive me, if I speak plainly, but I—Mrs. Leslie—would not have asked you to come and

help me, if you had not been a lady; and I count you as one of us. I know that at one time some persons treated those in their—well, employ—as if they were made of quite inferior clay; but those persons are not very numerous now, and those times have passed away. By all means, accept Lord Starminster's invitation. The little outing, the small excitement, will do you good. Here is another letter. It is to the secretary of the Home for Helpless Sweeps."

And she dictated the letter.

Lyra said no more, but went on with her work, and in the afternoon put on her plain black cashmere, and awaited Lord Dane's arrival.

He turned up at six o'clock, with a pair of handsome chestnuts in a light wagonette. He had not brought a groom, and called out through the open door into the hall where the ladies stood:

"I won't get down. Don't keep me longer than half an hour, unless you want the horses to make mince-pie of your gravel, Dosie."

"I call that base ingratitude, seeing that we are ready and waiting," said Mrs. Leslie.

He looked down at them with a smile on his handsome face, and tried to keep the light of admiration, and, alas! love, out of his eyes as they rested on Lyra.

"Now, who is going to ride up here?" he said. "Do you care about it, Fanshawe?"

"Perhaps one of the ladies would like to," said Mr. Fanshawe.

"All right," assented Dane, with alacrity.

"Not for me—thanks," remarked Mrs. Leslie, promptly. "I know those horses, and while I can see them I am always wondering whether they are going to run away or climb the trees."

"That doesn't say much for my driving," said Dane. "Coming, Dosie?"

But Lady Theodosia wanted to talk parish matters with Mr. Fanshawe.

"Do you mind, Lyra?" she said.

"I'll promise not to let them run away or climb the trees, Miss Chester," said Dane. "Here, give me your hand;" and he bent down and helped her up to the seat beside him. "Got plenty of wraps? It may be chilly coming home. That's all right. Off we are!" and the chestnuts bounded forward as if they had been released by a spring.



Dane kept his attention on them for a few minutes, then he got the dust-wrap and put it over Lyra's knees.

"Hope you are not nervous?" he said. "But I needn't ask that," he added, as he glanced at her face, upon which a faint rose color had dawned, but certainly no shadow of fright.

"I am not afraid, if that is what you mean," she said.

"How beautiful and shiny they are!"

"You are fond of horses?"

"Yes, though I know nothing about them. I did not see many horses in the val—"

She stopped suddenly, and the rose in her cheeks turned to carnation which faded and left them pale.

He looked straight ahead, as if he did not hear her; then, after a moment, he began to point out the objects of interest as the chestnuts went swiftly along the road.

"That's Fernley Hollow; the fairies dance there on All-hallows Eve. Fernley Parish Church—all the church towers are alike in this county. I'm not up in architecture, but I conclude that they must either have all been built by one man, or the other fellows copied him, and so on;" and he carefully avoided looking in her direction.

So presently the color stole back into Lyra's cheeks; the beauty of the evening, the swift, sure trot of the horses, and, alas and alas! his near presence, brought peace and a semblance of happiness to her weary heart.

After awhile they turned off the main road and passed between some open gates of white wood.

"We're on our own land now," he said.

Lyra started slightly and sighed.

"Why that sigh?" he asked. "Has Theodosia, who is almost a communist, already begun to teach you that it is wicked to own land—or, indeed, anything else beyond sixpence and a suit of clothes?"

Lyra smiled.

"I suppose we shall soon be there?" she said, ingenuously.

"Oh, that's it!" he remarked. "You mean that the drive is too short. Why didn't you say so before we turned in at the gates? I could have made a longer round of it."

"Oh! no, no," she murmured.

"But we've some distance to go yet," he said. "Didn't you bring a sun-shade? Never mind, we shall be in the shadow of the trees directly."

The sun was shining between the leaves, throwing a red glow on the chestnuts and the well-kept road; the birds were singing their evensong; a rabbit, fat and white of tail, scurried

across the glades now and again, and a squirrel ran up a tree and sat watching them with twinkling eyes.

Lord Dane and Lyra were silent for awhile, and scraps of the conversation being carried on behind them reached them.

"An evening school for the boys, and a Scripture class for the girls, say twice a week," they heard Lady Theodosia say earnestly; and the Reverend Martin Fanshawe's grave, resonant voice answering her: "Yes, it would be a good thing; but you must not undertake too much. It is well to labor in the vineyard, but I—we"—he corrected himself—"must not overtask your strength."

Dane smiled grimly.

"Are you going to teach in the Sunday school, Miss Chester?" he asked.

"I? No, I—I don't think so. I am not capable of it. Besides, Lady Theodosia has not asked me."

"You may be sure she will do so," he responded. "I rather think she asked me." He laughed, and Lyra could not help a soft echo of the laugh. There was always something infectious in Dane's light-heartedness. "I offered to go down on a week night and teach 'em boxing and fencing, or to give some of them a wrinkle in the art of throwing the fly—"

He pulled himself up, but not before the crimson had flooded Lyra's face again. Were they doomed to remind each other, every five minutes, of the past?

He flicked the off horse, and the surprised animal, who had been behaving like an angel with four legs, jumped and fidgeted.

"Do they ever run away?" asked Lyra, quietly.

"They try it on sometimes," he said. "They managed to get their heads one day when the coachman was driving, and ran for a couple of miles. They don't get enough work; my father objects to going fast—excepting in a train—and I am not often here. But you need not be anxious. They won't get away with us this evening. Would you like to see them stretch themselves? Would you like to go fast?"

Before she had considered her answer she had said yes.

He nodded with a glance of approval.

"I had an idea you would," he said. He touched them with the extreme end of the whip and let them have their heads a little, and away they went.

The color rose to Lyra's face, the light danced in her eyes. Then she remembered the other two ladies behind.

"Will they mind, be frightened?" she said, looking at him apologetically. "I did not think—"

"Not they," he said; "and just think of yourself, will you?" he added, rather grimly, "for have you not sold yourself into slavery—"

"Have those wretched horses bolted, Lord Dane?" broke in Mrs. Leslie's voice, but without much alarm in it.

"No, mum," he replied, in coachman fashion; "only a bit fresh, mum."

"Please don't drive so recklessly, Dane," came Lady Theodosia's calm, grave voice.

He bit his lip softly, but pulled up the horses.

"I wonder whether the parson looked afraid?" he muttered; then, a little louder: "I wish you and I had been alone; we'd have spun them for a couple of miles, at any rate."

Lyra turned her face away. They had been alone once, but it was very unlikely that they would be alone again for more than a few minutes as long as their lives lasted.

"There's the house," he said, presently, as he took the horses round a curve in masterly fashion.

Lyra raised her eyes from the horses and uttered an exclamation of amazed admiration.

Castle Towers had seemed grand to her, but this was a palace which she had never pictured even in imagination. The sun was shining obliquely across its immense façade, and bringing out all its strong points in the most striking and effective manner. The great elms cast long shadows over the velvet turf; the water in the basins of the fountains glittered crimson and yellow; a peacock perched on the rail of the terrace spread its tail, as if prompted by a desire to vie with the colors around him.

"How lovely! how lovely!" Lyra murmured.

He looked at her rapt eyes and then at the house—at the latter indifferently enough.

"It's a huge barrack of a place," he said, carelessly, almost apologetically.

"A barrack!" said Lyra, reproachfully.

"Well, that's what I call it," he said. "We are not often here. You see, there are only two of us, and it's fearfully dull. We're lost in it. My father—I hope you will like my father," he broke off.

Lyra smiled faintly.

"It is of more importance that Lord Starminster should like me," she said, quietly.

"I'll answer for his liking you," he said. "He couldn't



help it. But I was saying that my father, when he is here, practically lives in the library. I believe when he is alone he has his meals there. They send him in a chop—he fancies that chops are the only safe things for the gout—or a chicken; anything, he is quite content. He sits there all day reading or writing, and at night hobbles up to bed. That makes two, or at most three or four rooms; and there are all the rest. I forget how many bedrooms there are, over a hundred, I believe; and there aren't even ghosts to occupy them, for, somehow, the ghosts have shamefully neglected us, and we haven't a haunted chamber in the whole place."

"But you have friends, visitors?" said Lyra, absently; she was still looking with amazement at the vast pile of white stone.

"Oh, yes; a lot come down for a fortnight in the autumn. Some of 'em come for the shooting; but there is always a batch of political people. My father is a Cabinet minister, you know. I told you, you remember—" he checked himself and colored. Back to the past again! He would be making some such speech, some allusion to their former acquaintanceship, before Theodosia presently, he thought.

Lyra looked down.

"Are you a Cabinet minister, too?" she asked, innocently.

"But, oh, no; I remember—"

He stared at her, then laughed.

"I! Good heavens, no! I am, well, I am just nothing. And always shall be. I've no more brains than that peacock. Here we are." Then with a sudden recollection of his manners, he looked round.

"Hope you've enjoyed the drive?" he said.

"I do not see why there should be any difficulty in a surplined choir—" Lady Theodosia was saying to Mr. Fanshawe. "I beg your pardon, Dane; what did you say? Oh, yes; very much, indeed, thank you. I hope you have not frightened Miss Chester out of her wits."

"Miss Chester's inside her wits all right," he said, flinging the reins to a groom. He held out his arms as if he expected Lyra to leap into them, but she drew back.

"Give me your hands, then," he said. "Now jump."

They went up the broad steps flanked by a couple of huge lions rampant, and entered the hall. The vastness, though she had seen that of Castle Towers, struck Lyra. The sun streamed in through a large stained window at the back, a round table, with a tea-service, stood in the center, surrounded by palms. Flowers in Oriental vases lined the stairs, and, in-

deed, seemed everywhere, so that the figures of warriors in armor appeared as if in a bower.

"Have some tea before you take your hats off," said Dane, in his downright fashion.

"How good of you to think of it," exclaimed Mrs. Leslie. "Really, Lord Dane, you are growing most considerate."

"Ain't I?" he said. "Here's a chair, Miss Chester. Rather stand, all of you? Right. Dosie, pour out the tea. Mr. Fanshawe, if you'd prefer a soda and whisky—we don't dine till eight."

The Reverend Martin Fanshawe looked at him solemnly.

"I am a total abstainer, Lord Dane," he said, gravely.

"Right," said Dane. "So am I—when I can't get anything to drink," he added, in a whisper, to Lyra. He was evidently in the best, the highest spirits.

While Lady Theodosia was pouring out the tea, the earl came out of the library.

He was in evening-dress, and approached them with a pleasant smile on his worn face.

"Well, my dear Dosie," he said, and he bent and kissed her forehead. It was evident to Lyra that he was fond of Lady Theodosia. "How do you do, Mrs. Leslie?" That lady was a favorite of his, and his smile deepened as he took her hand. He exchanged greetings cordially enough with Martin Fanshawe. "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Fanshawe," he said; and as he spoke Lyra noticed the resemblance in the voices of the father and the son, though there was only the shadow of Dane's brightness in the earl's. "It is very good of you to spare an hour or two from the work which I hear so completely absorbs you." Then he looked at Lyra with a calm, expectant expression in the grave eyes weary with the burden of modern politics.

"This is Miss Chester," said Lady Theodosia. "You remember I told you—" she added, in a lower voice.

"Yes, yes," he said, and he bowed to Lyra, his eyes fixed on her face; then he held out his hand. "I am very glad to see you, Miss Chester," he said, in the tone which, though it was husky with much public speaking, struck Lyra as peculiarly musical and pleasant, perhaps because it had the echo of Lord Dane's in it. With the perfection of courtesy, he seated himself beside her. "No one offers me a cup of tea," he said, plaintively.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Lady Theodosia; and she poured one out for him. Lyra rose to pass it to him, and he put out his hand to stop her, but drew it back.

"Why should I not avail myself of the privilege of old age?" he said, with a smile. "Alas! Miss Chester, we soon learn that we are old when ladies insist upon waiting upon us. Your name seems familiar to me," he remarked, his eyes dwelling on her face with the admiration which an old man may permit himself without fear of giving offense. "I used to know some Chesters of Lowickshire; are you of that branch?"

"Yes; I think so. I have heard my father mention them, my lord," Lyra replied.

He nodded thoughtfully, and stirred his tea with his spoon in the old-fashioned way.

"Then we may almost count ourselves old friends," he said, with his pleasant smile. "The Chester property runs parallel with some of the Starminster land in Lowickshire. Do you like these parts?"

"I have only been here, with Lady Theodosia, a few days," said Lyra; "and at present I have not seen much of the country; but we drove through some very beautiful scenery."

"Ah, yes!" he said, absently; but his eyes were still fixed on her. "Dane drove you, did he not?" He looked across at his stalwart son, with a proud and affectionate glance. "Dane, had you not better go and dress?"

"All right, sir," said Dane. "I can change in ten minutes;" and he sprung up the stairs, two steps at a time.

A maid came to show the ladies to some rooms, where they could put themselves straight after their drive, and Lyra, following the others, got a glimpse of the famous picture-gallery, through which they passed, and the great organ, which was said to be the finest in any private house in England.

She was shown into a large room, with damask-covered walls and furniture, almost as old as the house itself, but so carefully preserved that it looked as if it had just come out of a modern upholsterer's.

As she brushed her hair, which the wind had ruffled, she could not help wondering at the freak of fate which had ordained that she should be here in Lord Dane's ancestral home—she who had never expected to see him again.

A maid hovered about, vainly attempting to help her, and almost piteously offering to take down her hair and rearrange it; but at last, in a kind of despair, she disappeared, and Lyra went to the window and looked out upon the wide-stretching lawns, waiting for the bell which she expected to ring.

Presently she heard it, a deep, solemn-toned gong, and she went into the hall. But there was no one there, excepting Lord Dane. He was standing with his back to the flower-



filled fire-place, his head dropped thoughtfully, and at the sound of her footsteps he straightened himself and came forward to meet her.

"Am I the first down?" she said, for the sake of saying something.

"Yes; and I am glad of it. Oh! they never appear until five or ten minutes after the dinner-bell."

"I did not know that; you ought to have told me," she said, with a smile.

"I am glad I didn't," he said. "It gives me an opportunity of showing you round. But perhaps you don't care to be 'shown round'?"

"Oh, yes."

"All right," he said, in his boyish fashion. "Come on, then. I'll try and do my duty." He caught up a walking-stick, and with a burlesque imitation of the professional guide, began to point to the various objects of interest in the hall.

"Portrait of the first Starminster, commonly known as 'Woodhead,' so called because no battle-ax had any effect upon his cranium. I've got the same kind of skull. That's his armor hanging above the picture. See the dents in the helmet? He died of eating too many mackerel—his favorite dish. Portrait of Catherine Third, Countess of Starminster. Observe her smile. Two of those smiles were warranted to kill of policeman of the period. She was called Catherine the Amiable; she was the last amiable person in the family. That red-headed gentleman, with the squint and the big fur muff, was a privy councillor in the reign of Elizabeth. He was called Starminster the Wise. I regret to say that he absorbed all the wisdom of the family. That lady with the eyebrows and the large mouth was called Maude the Beautiful. I have spent many weary years in the attempt to discover the feature or features which warranted the appellation. In the glass case beneath the portrait you will observe her fan. She was, I believe, great in the matter of fans and scented handkerchiefs. She died—of vanity—in the year 1509. That solemn individual, with the long nose, is Wilford Starminster, the Preacher. I don't know what he preached, but I believe he monopolized nearly all the jaw of the family. I say nearly all, because, as you know"—he stopped and colored—"because my father is a dab at public speaking. In the glass case to the right of the portrait is the dagger with which Adelaide Tenth, Countess of Starminster, stabbed her husband. In those happy days the dagger was a fond and familiar weapon; now we stab with our tongues. Want any more?"

"Yes, please," said Lyra.

"Portrait of Edmund, Earl of Starminster, in his peer's robes. That's the guv'nor. What a jolly life he could have led if he had been a laborer on the estate with fifteen dol—I beg your pardon—shillings a week. Portrait of your humble servant on his favorite pony—pony's leg out of drawing, as you not doubt perceive. Portrait of the same unworthy individual at the age of twenty-one; staring at nothing and trying with all his might not to look bored. Flags—they look like read rags, don't they?—carried by Starminsters at various battles duly chronicled in Mrs. Monkham's 'History of England.' Sword worn by Reginald, Earl of Starminster, at the battle of Salamanca. Uniform and eye-glass worn by Philip Starminster, Admiral of the Fleet, at the battle of the Nile. That hole in the coat is where the bullet entered which put an end to the gallant admiral. Have any more?"

Lyra nodded.

"Right. Portrait of Queen Elizabeth, taken while she was a guest at Starminster. We keep the room she slept in unoccupied and sacred in case any royalties should happen to pay us a visit; and they do so occasionally. Portrait of Her Majesty the Queen, 'presented by Victoria Regina to the Most Honorable the Earl of Starminster.' That's the guv'nor, you know."

He went through the whole in the lightest and highest of spirits, and had the stick still in his hand pointing to different objects when the other ladies came down the stairs. Lyra had stood in front of each picture and curio, her hands clasped behind her, her head thrown back, unconscious of the intent gaze of his eyes which sought her face as often as they could; unconscious, alas! of the hungry look in them—the expression of Love's hunger which dwells in the eyes of the man who looks at the woman he loves.

"What a number of famous persons!" she said, dreamily.

"Aren't they?" he assented. "It's true that most of them are more famous for their vices than their virtues; for instance, that gentleman in the suit of armor was a robber; the lady next him—well, perhaps I'd better pass her over; but the next gentleman—that one in the satin tunic—spent most of his days and all his nights in gambling; that one—the dueling Starminster—had a private graveyard of his own; that pretty little sword ran through six friends in private quarrels; the lady to the left of him bolted with her dearest friend's husband; and the youth next her turned pirate and

was, I believe, called the scourge of the ocean. Take us all together, we are a nice and eminently immoral family."

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

THE earl, coming down the stairs, heard the last word.

"Dane has been going through the portraits, I perceive, Miss Chester," he said; with a smile. "I am afraid you haven't formed a very high estimate of us; but Dane is a biased cicerone. He always contrives to pass over the respectable members of the race."

"It doesn't give me much trouble," said Dane, cheerfully. "There are so few."

The second bell rang and the earl gave his arm to Mrs. Leslie.

"Will you take charge of Lady Theodosia, Mr. Fanshawe," he said; and so Lyra fell to Lord Dane.

The dining-room at Starminster was, so said the authorities on decoration, rather heavy, but if so, it owed its somberness to carved oak, which had scarcely its equal in England. Lady Theodosia was proud of her oak at Castle Towers, but even she was fain to admit that the Starminster paneling carried the palm. A soft light from delicately shaded candles fell upon the glistening wood and the massive plate and embroidered sixteenth-century hangings. A butler, stately and solemn as a bishop, officered three gigantic footmen in the claret and yellow livery; huge palms, like those in the hall, stood on the hearth before the great mantel-piece, built up tier upon tier of carven oak; a dozen priceless old masters hung on the walls, the deep yet vivid coloring of the pictures contrasting finely with the mellow brown of the oak.

It seemed to Lyra, as she entered the room on Lord Dane's arm, that modern persons in their modern costumes were out of place in such an apartment, in which only powdered hair, satin doublets and silk stockings would be appropriate.

The footmen moved to and fro with noiseless deftness, the builer's voice never rose above a respectful whisper, but Lord Dane seemed as light-hearted and boyish in the midst of the patrician somberness as if he were up the valley fishing or eating his lunch behind a clump of rock.

He did most of the talking, but though he said very little directly to her, Lyra felt that he was not forgetting her. Once or twice she declined the dishes the footman brought her, and on the second occasion Lord Dane held up his hand and signed the man to stop.



"Better try this," he said, quietly. "It is better than it looks; and it's an *entrée* we are rather good at. Here, let me help you; may I?" and he helped her with his own hand.

Every now and then the earl addressed a remark to her—a remark of the simplest character, and his deep, thoughtful eyes rested upon her with a kindly regard while he spoke and she answered. It was the first "great" man Lyra had met, and she was deeply interested in watching and listening to him. To the ladies, one and all, his manner was delightful, perfect. He seemed to tender them a willing, respectful homage of which this generation is apparently incapable. If Lady Theodosia or Mrs. Leslie spoke, he bent forward with an expression of profound attention on his face and in his eyes, which never wandered while they were speaking. To Mr. Fanshawe he had not much to say, but he listened to that gentleman with evident interest.

"You and Lady Theodosia must be making Castle Towers into a laborers' 'earthly paradise,'" he said. "I hope they will be satisfied." He smiled gravely, doubtfully. "They tell me that the more prosperous the working-man becomes, the more radical he grows."

"That's human nature," said Lord Dane; "the more we have the more we want. Some of these days Dosie will find the house besieged by a mob of her petted peasantry. 'Petted peasantry' wouldn't be a bad phrase on a platform, would it, sir?"

The earl smiled indulgently.

"You know that I have long been impressed by the conviction that you are a born orator, Dane," he said.

Lord Dane made a grimace.

"Not I, sir; I couldn't utter three consecutive sentences. I should get stage-fright and break down. But what was I saying? Oh! that some day Dosie will find herself surrounded by a mob clamoring for a division of the property. Then she'll be sorry she has been so generous."

Lady Theodosia smiled.

"When that day comes, we shall know how to protect ourselves," she said. "Mrs. Leslie and Lyra and I will take the weapons from the armory and make a good fight of it, won't we, Lyra?"

"Trust you!" said Dane. "You good people are always ready for a fight. Do you think you could fire off a gun through one of the port-holes of the castle, Miss Chester?"

It was all nonsense they were talking, but it was pleasant

for Lyra to feel herself included in and taking a share of the nonsense.

When the ladies left the room, the earl signed to the two gentlemen to draw nearer to him, and the butler brought in the famous Starminster port, which, however, had grown famous in vain, so far as Mr. Fanshawe was concerned.

"No? You don't drink wine?" said the earl. "So many persons are total abstainers nowadays. I dare say it is all right; indeed, from several points of view, I am sure it is all right. I suppose, for instance, that if our forefathers had drunk less port, we, their children, should have less gout."

He sipped as he spoke.

Dane laughed.

"The worst of it is that it's the wrong people who abstain," he said. "Mr. Fanshawe, for instance—there is not the remotest chance of his drinking to excess."

"Who knows?" said the Reverend Martin, gravely. "Every one might say that he was safe—every one was at the beginning."

Dane finished his glass—the earl smiled blandly. If a guest had advocated cannibalism he, the host, would not have contradicted him.

"The world is growing very good," he said, softly.

"It is time it did, my lord," responded the Reverend Martin, uncompromisingly. Dane laughed.

"We shall all bud wings presently," he said, "like old bottled port."

The Reverend Martin frowned and opened his lips as if about to rebuke such ill-timed levity, but the earl rose at the moment.

"Let us join the ladies," he said.

Dane went to the window opening on to the terrace.

"I'll go round by the terrace and snatch a cigarette on the way," he said. He stepped out on the terrace and lighted his cigarette, and drew a long breath, as an actor does who has just left the stage after playing a difficult part; and, indeed, it had been a difficult part for him. He had been compelled to sit at the same table with two women, one of whom he loved with a love beyond words to describe, the other his future wife.

The very touch of Lyra's dress thrilled him, the regard of her lovely eyes went through him; every time she spoke her voice seemed to touch a sympathetic chord in his heart. She was the one woman in the world for him—and he was engaged to Lady Theodosia!

He strode up and down the terrace, gnawing at his cigarette rather than smoking it, then he flung it away with a kind of groan, and went toward the drawing-room window. It was open, and a slim figure in a dark dress stood beside it. His heart leaped, for he recognized Lyra.

"I promised you a moon to drive home by, and there it is, you see," he said.

She started slightly, for she had not heard his step. Lady Theodosia was at the piano, and the music floated out to them. He stood and listened for a moment.

"How well Lady Theodosia plays!" said Lyra, warmly.

"Yes," he said, absently; "she does everything well." He took out his cigar-case. "May I? Won't you come out a little further? You can see the river from the edge of the terrace. There are trout in it—"

He stopped and bit his cigar viciously.

Lyra leaned on the stone balustrade and looked dreamily on the moonlit plain.

"Tell me," he said, after awhile, "are you quite happy—comfortable?"

"At Castle Towers?" she said. "Quite—oh, quite. Both Lady Theodosia and Mrs. Leslie are very, very kind to me."

"Kind!" he echoed, almost gruffly. "Of course they would be kind. But—but are you sure you are happy?"

"Yes," she said, gently; "as happy as I should be anywhere. I—I have had trouble lately."

"I know," he said.

"Ah, no!" she thought, "you do not know, can not guess;" but she remained silent.

"If you were not happy," he went on, smoking furiously, "I would—well, I would find some other place for you—"

He stopped and flung the cigar into the shadow with a desperate violence. "What sports of fate we are!" he said, half inaudibly. "Here are you and I—"

She turned her pale face to him, with a sad look of reproach in it, and he bit his lip.

"I—I beg your pardon. I forgot."

"Yes," she said, in a low voice; "you forgot. But will you—I ask you very earnestly, Lord Dane—will you remember that I am just a stranger who happens to be Lady Theodosia's companion, and that you need only be just civil to her?"

"I'll try and remember," he said, audibly; but, inaudibly, he added: "But it will be darned hard!"

Mrs. Leslie stepped through the open window.

"Are you there, Lord Dane?" she said. "Please to re-



member that you are going to drive us home, and that the moon will not last very long."

"Oh, yes, it will!" he said, confidently.

"Oh, no, it won't!" she retorted. "I know that kind of moon. It will drop down in an hour or two and leave a Cimmerian darkness behind it. I think we should like to start now."

"All right," he said, promptly; and he took a whistle from his pocket and blew it.

"Bring round the drag," he said to the groom who appeared.

"I shall not see the moon from Starminster terrace again for some time," he said to Lyra.

"No?" she said, with faint surprise.

"No," he said, almost sullenly. "I am going north shortly. I shall spend the Christmas in Africa, the Easter in—Lord knows where!"

He glanced down at her face, upon which the moonlight was falling. It was sad, but resigned.

"But who cares?" he said, recklessly.

"Lady Theodosia," Lyra murmured.

He laughed.

"Dosie! She care? Not while she has her parish, and her missionaries, and the Reverend Martin—"

"Oh, hush!" said Lyra.

He laughed again.

"It's true," he said. "Lord, what a game of cross-purposes life is."

Mrs. Leslie, clad in her out-door things, came out again, and Lyra went into the house.

When she came down-stairs the break was at the door, and Lord Dane was in his driver's perch. The earl stood on the terrace, bareheaded, taking leave of them with his old-world courtesy.

"Gently, Dane, this drive," he said. "Dosie, are you sure you are well wrapped up? Mr. Fanshawe, it is useless to offer you a cigar, I know. Mrs. Leslie, I trust you will not catch cold. Where are you going to sit, my dear?"

This query was addressed to Lyra, who stood a little apart, her eyes fixed on the moon.

"Anywhere, my lord," she said.

"Give Miss Chester a hand up here, father," said Lord Dane, in a determined voice.

"She will be warmer inside," said Mrs. Leslie.

"Oh, there are plenty of wraps up here," said Dane, in a would-be careless tone.

Lyra hung back, the earl stood waiting, and Lord Dane's hand was extended.

"I believe you are afraid," said Lady Theodosia, with a laugh.

Lyra put her foot on the step, and disregarding Lord Dane's hand, sprung up.

"That's right," he murmured. "Hold on a minute," to the groom, who literally seemed to hang on to the fretting, impatient horses. "Now, just get quite comfortable," he said to Lyra, and he folded a wrap across her knees. "Right? All right, Parkins, let them go."

The horses sprung forward, and in a moment or two Starminster, with all its gleaming lights, was left behind.

Lyra drew a long breath, and looked round her.

"It is even more beautiful in the moonlight," she said, softly.

"Is it?" he responded. "I wish we were going to drive for a week, a month."

As he spoke a deer—the woods were full of them—darted from the shadow of the trees right across the road.

The near horse started and rose on its hind legs, then, as the whip cut it, darted forward. Its mate, as much alarmed by its companion's conduct as by the deer, followed suit, the wagonette swayed to and fro, then seemed to rush forward as if drawn by an express.

Dane got a good grip of the reins, and leaned far back in the effort to pull up the frightened horses. Then, as the effort failed and the wagonette began to sway again, he leaned forward and looked down.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Lyra, quietly.

He glanced at the beautiful face uplifted to his.

"Are you afraid?" he asked.

"No, not in the least," she answered as quietly as before.

"That's all right," he said, between his teeth, "because the off trace has broken and these beasts have bolted. Aren't you going to scream?"

"No; I shall not scream," she said.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

THERE is not, probably, a better horseman, a cooler and more expert whip in England than Dane. He has a hand that can be, as occasion requires, as soft as velvet or as hard as

steel; and his nerves are completely under control. Given a goodish road, with no nasty turns or corners, a pair of bolting horses, well and strongly harnessed, would not ordinarily trouble him in the least; but to-night the conditions are scarcely fair.

He has a pair of young, high-fettled, underworked horses, a light wagonette with three women in it—and a broken trace.

The road, though straight for a mile, is narrow and edged with trees, and there is the not too broad gate-way at the bottom of the hill

Dane has a great belief in the influence of the human voice over the equine temper, and when he is out riding or driving alone, is wont to converse pretty freely with his horse.

Sometimes a quiet "Now, then, old lady!" will do more in the way of correction or soothing than any amount of whip; so now, as he gets a tight grip of the reins and brings a steady, iron-like pressure to bear upon the horses, he speaks a few words quietly and remonstratingly.

"Gently, my dears—gently! What's the matter, old man? No, hurry, Peter. Steady!"

But while he is talking, the broken trace is skipping along the ground and slapping like a thick-thonged whip against Peter's side, and Peter declines to listen to reason, and he and his companion race madly along, the trees flying by as they fly by the windows of the Scotch express.

For a moment or two there is a dead silence; then Mrs. Leslie utters a faint cry and rises, clutching the back of the wagonette.

"Oh, Lord Dane, they have run away!" she gasps.

Though Dane does not turn his head, he sees her.

"I know that," he says. "Sit down at once, and keep quiet."

And there is the grim sternness in his voice which comes into that of the man who holds the lives of others—and women—in his hands.

Mrs. Leslie sinks into her seat, and grips Lady Theodosia's arm.

"We shall be killed!" she says, in a tone of despair.

Lady Theodosia, very pale, but with her lips tightly closed, as if she would rather die than call out, glances at her, and then at Martin Fanshawe.

"We shall be all right; Dane will stop them presently," she says, in a low voice. "He is very strong."

"A trace has broken," says Martin Fanshawe,



He, too, is rather pale, but there is no look of fear in his eyes.

"Can you help him?" suggested Lady Theodosia.

Martin Fanshawe leans forward to Dane.

"Can I do anything, Lord Dane?" he asks, quietly.

"Yes," replies Dane. "Keep the ladies in their seats; keep them there whatever happens. But we shall be all right directly."

Lyra says not a word. She is pale also; but she looks down at the mad, tearing horses with a bright and steady eye. Faith will move mountains, and her faith in Dane is strong enough to dispel all fear. Now and again she glances at his face, with its set lips and stern eyes, with its jowl squared by the tightly set teeth; and as she looks almost loses sense of their common peril. Strength, courage, these are the qualities women love in men; and strength and courage are personified in the man who sits beside her, keeping the grip of a Hercules on the terror-stricken horses.

Down the hill they rush, the gravel flying from under their hoofs, their breath rising, like steam in the moonlight, from their distended nostrils. How much longer will he be able to keep them straight? she asks herself, not in a paroxysm of terror, but with a strange sense of calmness almost amounting to indifference.

What will happen? Will the carriage, which is swaying like a ship anchored in a heavy sea, strike the trunk of one of the trees, or will the horses fall? It is almost as if she had lost all sense of her own share in the common risk, as if she were merely playing the part of a safe though interested spectator.

As they approach the narrow gate-way and that awkward bend in the road, he glances at her, a swift, sudden glance, and says:

"Are you holding on tight?"

"Yes," she replies quietly, and, as he notices, without a quiver or tremor in her voice.

"That's right. Stick on, whatever happens, unless I tell you to jump."

"Yes," she responds, obediently.

"This is almost as bad as the Taw at spring flood," he murmurs. "Do you remember?"

The color comes into her face, but she does not reply. Does she remember? Is it likely that she has forgotten, will ever forget?"

"Look round and tell me if they are all sitting down," he says, presently.

She looks over her shoulder. Mrs. Leslie is gripping the seat, Lady Theodosia is holding on with one hand, and, yes, Mr. Martin Fanshawe has hold of the other.

"They are quite still and sitting down."

"That's all right," he says, with his favorite formula. "Now, if I can keep them straight through this gate—if they don't shy. Can you do something if I want you to, Lyra?"

Even in that moment of deadly peril she notices that he calls her by her Christian name, and it makes her heart bound.

"I will try," she answers, quietly.

"Right. Take the whip out from the socket behind me; I can't spare a hand. When I say 'Now,' give the off horse—the right-hand one, you know—"

"I know."

"Give him a good cut from the outside. I want to keep him close to the other, so that he may clear the gate-posts—see?"

"I see," she says, as calmly as even he could desire, and she raises the whip in readiness.

They near the gate, and Mrs. Leslie utters a faint moan.

"The gate!" she gasps. "We shall overturn there!"

Dane sets his lips tightly, and gets a renewed grip of the reins.

"Ready?" he asks between his teeth. "Now, then!"

Lyra has been mentally rehearsing since she received her orders, and, with a very fair imitation of her master, she swings the whip and swipes the off horse across the back from right to left. The terrified animal instinctively sweeps on to the pole, and the pair carry the carriage clear of the posts.

"Bravo!" he says, almost inaudibly. "What pluck you've got! You've saved us that time. Hold on tight, and I'll have them in hand in another minute or two. Don't be afraid."

The few simple words of praise make her heart throb with happiness and pride. As far as she is concerned, the horses may run on till this time to-morrow night, may race on forever. Danger, death may be near, but all sense of it is swallowed up in the thrill those words of his have sent through her veins.

"I am not afraid," she says; then, in justice, she adds, "nor are the others, excepting, perhaps, Mrs. Leslie, and she is only a little— Oh, look there!" she breaks off.

Right ahead of them, some way across the road, is an empty

wagon. The horse is out, and grazing by the hedge. The driver has either left the cart or is asleep inside.

"That floors it," he says, between his teeth. "There is only just room to pass, if the horses were going quietly, with the harness all sound. Now listen," he goes on, quickly but quietly: "I sha'n't try to pass. I'm going to turn 'em—if I can—up that bank, in the hope that the pole will break. Sit tight unless I tell you to jump." Then he says, loud enough to be heard by the others: "Sit still, and don't be afraid."

They near the wagon. At the sound of the tearing horses, a man, evidently startled from sleep, opens the tilt cover and stares at them, then leaps out, but stands, hesitating, confused, and afraid.

"Don't touch them!" shouts Dane, quite unnecessarily; and as he speaks, with a tremendous tug and pressure he turns the horses toward the bank.

If the reins hold they must go! The reins do hold, and, blundering, they rush and stumble up the slope and fall in a confused heap of horses and harness into the ditch. The carriage sways. If the pole will only break, it will keep upright after all; but, unfortunately, the pole is a good one, and stands the strain, and the next moment the wagonette, which seems like an empty match-box, for lightness, topples over.

Just as it goes, Dane says, swiftly, sharply: "Jump!" and Lyra, as if every muscle were waiting on his command, obeys.

She stumbles forward on her knees, but instantly regains her feet and looks round. Lord Dane has already unstrapped the other trace, and is getting the horses clear of the pole. He glances at her with a quick, apprehensive look; then, seeing that she is unhurt, nods and resumes his task.

Then Lyra looks for the rest.

Still in the wagonette, and clinging like grim death, is Mrs. Leslie, evidently safe and uninjured; but a few yards off, on the road, lies Mr. Martin Fanshawe, and he lies very still and quiet. Beside him, on one knee, is Lady Theodosia, bending over him with frightened face.

Lyra goes quickly down the bank to them.

"Oh! is he hurt?" she asks, anxiously.

But Lady Theodosia does not seem to hear her, does not even remove her eyes from the clergyman's white face.

Lyra kneels down on the other side of him.

"Is he hurt?" she says again. "Did he fall out? What shall we do?" and she looks round helplessly.

Lord Dane, with language quite unfit for publication, but



with a certain coolness, is endeavoring to make the alarmed and conscience-stricken carter of some use, and between them they have got the horses on their feet.

"Now hold 'em tight, and lead them out of sight of the carriage. Don't look like a boiled turnip, you blockhead! Do you think they are going to eat you? Whoa, Peter!"

Then he lifts Mrs. Leslie out of the wagonette, and sets her on her feet as he has done the horses.

"You're all right," he says, cheerfully; "you are indeed; but I'm afraid they've come to grief over there. Don't you come; you sit still for a few minutes. What is the matter?" he asks, bending over the prostrate man. "Here, let me unfasten his collar," and he, too, kneels.

But with a sharp, sudden gesture Lady Theodosia appears to be conscious of their presence. With one hand she lifts the head of the unconscious man, and with the other wards off Dane's proffered assistance.

"No, no!" she says, in a dry, trembling voice. "Don't touch him! I will do it! I will do it!"

Then as she unfastens his collar, and she sees a splash of blood on her hand where it has touched the back of his head, she utters a low cry of terror and anguish.

"He is killed! he is killed!" she wails; "he is dead! Oh, Martin, Martin!"

Lord Dane starts and draws back, gazing at her sternly.

"Dodie!" he says, warningly.

"Is he dead? Tell me!" she pants, disregarding his tone and manner, and seeming utterly reckless in her terror and grief. "Tell me the truth! See, he doesn't breathe!"

"Hush! hush!" he says, his lips tightly set. "He is not dead. Collect yourself."

"Are you sure?" she demands, still with her eyes fixed on the face that rests on her arm—is pressed, indeed, to her palpitating bosom. "You are not deceiving me? Oh, Dane, tell me the truth! I—I love him!"

Dane's face grows white; he lays his hand on her shoulder and grasps it, not cruelly, but firmly.

"There is no need to tell us that," he says, sternly, with grim irony. "Control yourself."

Then he turns to Lyra without looking at her.

"Soak this handkerchief in the ditch," he says, grimly, in the tone of a man who knows that he will meet with prompt obedience.

She takes the handkerchief and springs to the ditch; but

when she comes back, Lady Theodosia takes it from her hand, and herself bathes Martin Fanshawe's forehead.

Dane has got him upon his knee, and has examined the wound at the back of his head.

"He struck a stone," he says, more to himself than the others.

"Yes," wails Lady Theodosia; "it was in trying to save me! It is my fault! I have killed him! Oh, Martin, Martin!"

Lord Dane puts his hand on her shoulder again.

"Be silent!" he says, in a low, stern voice. "You are not alone, Theodosia."

But she does not heed him—seems, indeed, scarcely to hear him, or, at any rate, understand.

"He tried to hold me, to keep me from falling out," she says, in the same half-unconscious moan. "It is always of others that he thinks first, never of himself. There is no one in the world like him—Ah!"

She breaks off with a long, trembling breath of joy and hope as Martin Fanshawe opens his eyes.

Lord Dane nods at Lyra, who stands pale and aghast, simply overwhelmed by the revelation of Lady Theodosia's secret.

"Take her away," he says, huskily.

"Come with me, Lady Theodosia," she says, bending over her. "He is all right—see?"

Lady Theodosia looks up at her with wild eyes, as if she does not recognize her for a moment; then she puts her hand to her brow, looks at Dane—a strange, questioning gaze, then rises, and, resting on Lyra's arm, withdraws a few paces, but still looking over her shoulder at the injured man.

"Are you sure he is recovering?" she asks—demands, rather. "He opened his eyes, did he not? It was not my fancy? Did he speak?"

"Not yet," says Lyra; "but I don't think he is much hurt, Lady Theodosia."

"How do you know? How can you tell?" retorts Lady Theodosia, in a tone and manner so unlike her ordinary ones that Lyra, even in that moment, asks herself if this can really be the same woman, the calm, self-possessed Lady Theodosia of a few hours, minutes ago.

"Lord Dane is helping him up; he is standing quite well," she says.

Lady Theodosia by a glance assures herself of the truth of this statement, then allows Lyra to lead her to the bank. She sits down and holds her hand over her face for a moment or

two, and Lyra sees her lips move as if in prayer; then she looks up.

"What—what have I said?" she asks, in a whisper.

Lyra averts her eyes.

"Never mind now," she replies, soothingly. "You—you were upset and frightened. You did not know what you were saying."

A faint flush comes into Lady Theodosia's face.

"Tell me what I said," she demands.

Lyra's face grows hot.

"Oh, I can not!" she murmurs.

Lady Theodosia looks down at the ground.

"Did—did he hear me?" she asks.

Lyra is silent for a moment.

"Yes. I—I am afraid so."

Lady Theodosia's face grows almost as red as Lyra's, and she sighs.

"I—I thought he was dead," she says. "I—I did not know he could hear; but—but it—it would have been all the same."

"I—I thought you meant Lord Dane," says Lyra. "Mr. Fanshawe did not hear. He was unconscious."

Lady Theodosia draws a breath of relief.

"I meant Mar—Mr. Fanshawe," she says, in a low voice. "Go and see if he is hurt, and come and tell me. Be quick, please."

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

LORD DANE and Martin Fanshawe are standing a little apart, the former leaning against a tree, the latter, with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, looking straight before him.

The first word that leaves Martin Fanshawe's lips, when he can speak, is Lady Theodosia's name.

"Lady Theodosia!" he says. "Is she hurt? Where is she?"

"She is all right. Neither she nor the other ladies are hurt," replies Dane, with a slight emphasis on "the other ladies."

Martin Fanshawe draws a breath of relief, very much as Lady Theodosia had done.

"Thank you," he says, in a low voice. "I thought she fell. I remember—"

"She says you saved her, somehow or other," remarks Dane, briefly.



"Did I? I can not be too thankful if I did," murmurs Martin Fanshawe. "You are not hurt, I hope, Lord Dane?"

"Oh, I'm all right," says Dane. "We should have got through the performance without an upset if it had not been for that confounded wagon."

As he speaks Lyra comes up.

"Lady Theodosia wishes to know if Mr. Fanshawe is better," she says, with downcast eyes.

Martin Fanshawe colors.

"Yes, yes; thank you. I will come to her;" and he goes toward her as quickly as he can.

Dane stands for a moment, still looking before him in silence; then he says:

"Nobody has asked if *you* are hurt," he says, with a side glance at her.

It seems as if he dared not look her straight in the face, lest she should read the deep joy of freedom that glows in his eyes.

"There is no need," she says, avoiding his eyes as he avoids hers, "it is so evident that I am quite sound."

He looks over his shoulder at the group behind them.

"They have to be got home somehow," he says.

"Why should we not drive?" she suggests. "The horses are quite quiet now, are they not?"

He laughs grimly.

"Quiet as two dead mice," he says; "but nothing would induce Mrs. Leslie to get into that wagonette again, even if there were no horses to it."

"Can I not walk on to Castle Towers and send a carriage?"

"No, you can not," he retorts, curtly. "As you appear to be the only one who has not lost her head, you must stay and look after them; I will go back to Starminster." He takes a step or two, then stops, and for a moment looks her full in the eyes. "Lyra—Miss Chester, I must speak to you to-night."

She does not answer, and, as if he can not trust himself to say another word, he walks toward the horses.

She sees him remove all the harness, excepting the head-stall and bearing reins, from one of them, and the next moment he is riding it barebacked in the direction of the Hall.

"Good gracious!" exclaims Mrs. Leslie, "what is Lord Dane doing?"

"Going for a carriage," explains Lyra.

"Oh, not for me! I could not enter anything on wheels again to-night. I had a presentiment something was going to

happen when those dreadful horses plunged so at starting. Is my bonnet straight? I feel as if I were standing on my head! How provokingly cool and tidy you look, my dear! Poor Mr. Fanshawe—I wonder whether he has broken any bones!" Lyra glances over to the bank where Lady Theodosia and he are sitting, and says nothing. "I'll walk on; I've told Theodosia I would do so," says Mrs. Leslie. "No, you must not come; you must stay with Lady Theodosia. I shall be quite safe. Indeed, I would rather meet fifty tramps and footpads than ride behind anything on four legs again to-night. Oh, dear! why is it people take a delight in driving wild horses?" and, vainly endeavoring to "settle" her crushed bonnet, she walks off down the road.

Lyra does not join the other two, but seats herself at the foot of a big fir-tree and tries to think. She is still endeavoring to realize what has happened. Lady Theodosia's frenzied, passionate "I love him! I love him!" is still ringing in her ears, when she sees a carriage and pair coming quickly, but steadily enough, down the road, and in another moment Lord Dane is at her side.

"Get them in," he says, gravely, as if she and he were in charge of a pair of children or lunatics; and while the rest are entering the carriage, he superintends the two grooms whom he has brought in the work of setting the overturned carriage on its wheels and reharnessing the horses. Then he gets on the box of the carriage, and the coachman drives off.

Scarcely a word is spoken by the three inside on the way to Castle Towers. Lady Theodosia leans far back in her corner, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes either closed or fixed before her with a far-away look. Martin Fanshawe, his impressive face still rather pale, his usually immaculate collar crushed and blood-stained, gazes out of the window with a grave, perturbed regard; and Lyra leans back in her corner as far as she can go, and still tries to realize the tremendous purport of the scene she has participated in.

When they reach Castle Towers, Lady Theodosia alights, and without a word to the others, walks into the hall. There she stops, and addressing Lyra, says:

"Will you ask Lord Dane if he will come to me in the library?"

At the library door she pauses and looks at Martin Fanshawe, opens her lips as if about to speak, but says nothing, and passes in.

"In the library? All right," says Dane, in response to Lyra, and with an obviously forced carelessness. "Fanshawe,

you had better get a wash and something to drink. I will join you presently."

"Thank you, no," says Martin Fanshawe; "but I will wait a little while. I should like to speak—I have something I wish to say to you, Lord Dane."

Dane nods and enters the library. As he closes the door behind him, Lady Theodosia rises from the chair into which she had sunk, and stands before him. She is very pale, and her usually firm lips quiver, but the grave eyes meet his with a steadfast, unflinching courage, the courage of a good, true woman who has made the discovery that her heart has played her false.

"Dane," she says, and her voice, though low and tremulous, is clear and distinct enough, "I—I think you know what it is I have to say, to confess."

He stands regarding her silently, with something like pity, something still more like sympathy, in his handsome eyes, and with a kind of admiration. Yes, this little woman who was to have been his wife is as brave as a red Indian, he thinks.

"Dane," she goes on, "you—you heard what I said out in the road?"

He inclines his head.

She put her hands to her lips to steady them.

"I—I was scarcely conscious of what I was saying."

"I know that," he says, very grimly.

She looks up at him.

"Yes; but—but it was true."

"I know that, too," he says, with a nod.

"It was true. It is shameful, it is terrible, but it is true. Dane, I have broken faith with you. I have been false to you. I"—she bites her lips—"I do love him. But"—she goes on quickly, desperately, before he can speak—"but I did not know it till to-night. You will believe that, Dane? You will not think me so base, so unworthy, so treacherous, as I should be if I had known what—what his danger and my terror revealed to me."

"I believe you, Dosie," he says, gently.

She regards him with faint, sad surprise. She had expected to have to meet his reproaches, perhaps his fury.

"And—and you forgive me?" she whispers, almost inaudibly.

He crosses the room and puts his arm round her, and looks down into her sad, "good" eyes, into which her gentleness has brought the sudden tears.

"My poor Dosie!" he says; and he kisses her on the fore-



head—a brother's, a father's kiss—"my poor little Dosie! Do you think I wanted you to say all this, to eat humble pie and make full confession? Why, no. I saw it all, understood it all, in a moment, and—and I forgave you then. Forgive!" and his voice is full of sad reproach. "For God's sake, don't use that word! I need your forgiveness quite as much—ever so much more—than you need mine. If you knew all—"

She stops him with a gesture.

"I—I think I have long guessed, known that you did not love me, Dane," she says.

He bites his lip, and looks down quite as penitently as she had done. It was his turn now.

"Yes; I felt it. But I did not know that—that there was some one else. There is some one else, Dane?" she asks, asserts, rather, in a very low voice.

He colors swiftly and nods.

"There is Dosie," he says. "Don't ask who it is—don't ask anything. I can't tell you yet; but I will presently—soon, please God! I—I think you will be surprised. But that's enough. All is said and understood between us, isn't it?"

"Yes," she says, rather sadly—for what woman likes to yield up the man who has been counted as her lover, though she loves him not, nor he her?"—"yes. I'm afraid the earl—"

He laughs.

"The gov'nor will have to put up with it," he says. "Anyway, he won't expect you to marry me when you are in love—"

"Don't!" she murmurs, hanging her head. "You—you forget that he"—of course, she means Martin Fanshawe; he is the "he" for the rest of her life—"he does not—may not—"

Dane laughs again.

"My dear Dosie, the poor fellow loves the very ground you tread upon. Why, the very first words he said, when he came to, were: 'Lady Theodosia! There!'" and he pats her on the shoulder, "make your mind easy. It will all come right, please God! Now, you get off to bed, and I'll get something to drink, and make for home. Good-night, Dosie." He kisses her again, then laughs. "I say, you've forgotten one thing," he says.

"Yes? What is that?" she says, lifting her still shame-dimmed eyes to his.

"You haven't offered to be a sister to me. It's the usual request on these occasions, isn't it?"

She puts her arms round him now, and standing on tiptoe, puts her trembling lips against his cheek.

"Ah, Dane, dear," she murmurs, "it is not necessary! Dane, you—you have been very good to me." Her eyes filled with tears. "I—I thought you would be sure to—to swear at me, at the very least."

"All right," he says, cheerfully. "I'll do it still, if it will make you feel easier in your conscience. But if I do, you must swear at me back again, for I deserve it quite as much as you do."

At Dane's half-comical words, Theodosia shakes her head, slips from his arms, and goes out by the opposite door, and he draws himself up, gives himself a shake, and, with a long breath, returns to the hall.

The Reverend Martin Fanshawe is pacing up and down the hall, his thin, "intellectual" hands lightly clasped behind his back, his face pale and set.

"Come in here," says Dane. "Or let us go outside, eh?"

They go on to the terrace, and Dane links his arm in the thin but muscular one of the young parson; but Martin Fanshawe releases himself.

"If—if you knew what I have to say, Lord Dane, I am afraid you would not be so friendly."

"Oh!" says Dane, cheerily, "think so?"

"Lord Dane," says Martin, facing him as bravely as Theodosia had done, "I have to make a confession to you. I will do so in the fewest possible words; and then—then I will leave myself in your hands."

Dane smiles grimly.

"No, thanks. You would be too large a baby to carry. Or do you mean that you want to cross over to France and fight a duel with me? Beg pardon, though; I forgot—that's a luxury you are debarred from. My dear fellow, you can spare yourself your confession. You love Lady Theodosia?"

Martin Fanshawe starts and crimson; but he meets his companion's eyes steadily for a moment, then his head droops.

"Yes, Lord Dane, I love her. I have loved her—"

Dane nods.

"Ever since you first saw her—I know."

"You know? Ah! But, Lord Dane, you must know that—that I would rather have died than reveal that love. I was going away from here, lest some unwary look or word of mine should betray it. I had wished to do so—to leave here as soon as possible; but—but to-night I learned—" He stops; then he looks Dane straight in the face. "Lord Dane, was I still unconscious—did I dream that—that I heard her say—"

Dane puts his hand upon his shoulder.

"You had better ask her that question, my dear fellow," he says.

A light, a joyous light, flashes into the young man's grave eyes and his breath comes fast.

"Then it *was* true," he murmurs. Then, aloud, he says: "And—and you bid me go to her—you give me permission? Lord Dane, I—I do not understand!"

Dane takes out his cigar-case and lights a cigar.

"Sounds rather generous and Quixotic, doesn't it?" he says, slowly. "Make your mind easy, my dear fellow; I am neither the one nor the other. I don't, as a rule—worse luck for me!—yield what I want myself." He pauses, and then goes on, in a low voice and slowly: "If I wanted Dosie as badly as you do, I should be quite ready to go over to France with you, or have it out here on the terrace, with or without pistols. Have I said enough?"

Martin Fanshawe gasps in silence for a moment, then he holds out his hand.

"I—I think I understand," he says; "but I want to think it over, to realize it. It seems too good to be true."

"Good luck always does," remarks Dane, laconically. "Yes, you go home and bathe your head; I haven't asked yet whether you've broken it or not, but I don't think you have. You go home and think it over, and to-morrow—well, take my advice, and ask Lady Theodosia whether you are still off your head, or really heard what you fancied you heard her say. There, off with you! Good-night."

He stands and watches the young parson as he strides across the lawn, then he begins to pace up and down, smoking furiously.

Is it true that he is free, that the shackles have fallen from his long-fettered hands? Free to—to tell Lyra that he still loves her, to make her his wife? His wife! the word sends the blood, never very sluggish, rushing madly through his veins. His wife! He laughs a laugh of half-wild exultation, and stretches out his arms as might a prisoner from whom the jailer has just knocked off the chains. Lyra—his Lyra! His!

He leans over the marble rail of the terrace and looks out on to the moonlit gardens, but seeing them not. It is a slim, graceful figure he sees, standing, rod in hand, beside the stream in the Taw valley.

A shadow falling beside him startles him from dream-land, and turning, he sees a figure—*her* figure—passing the drawing-room window. He turns and strides to it, and calls to



her. She starts and utters a faint cry of alarm, then stands still, but as if ready to fly.

"Lyra," he says; and quiet as his voice is, there is a subtle ring of joy in it. "Lyra."

She does not move; indeed, she seems to shrink from him, and he takes her hand and draws her, gently but irresistibly, out on to the terrace beside him. He holds her thus for a moment, looking into her face, waiting for her downcast eyes to rise, that he may look into them, into the soul beneath.

"Lyra," he says at last, "I am free—free! But you know that; you heard what she said. You know it all. You know how I love you. By Heaven!" his voice trembles, "I scarcely know whether I am awake or dreaming. As *he* said, it seems too good to be true. Free! Lyra, do you love me a little? Do you love me well enough to be—my wife?"

She stands as far off as she can from him, her heart beating wildly with indescribable joy, with indescribable misery.

He looks at her, his eyes "hungry with love," half amazed, half confused by her coldness. Then, as if unable to restrain himself longer, he takes her other hand and draws her to him—so close to him that her face rests against his, and she can feel the tumultuous beating of his heart.

"My dearest! my love!" he murmurs, huskily, for in such passion as his the voice makes no soft music; "at last, at last! Oh, my darling, if you knew how I have suffered! if you knew what it has cost me to be true and honorable! But it has all come right at last. Forgive me, and try and love me a little, Lyra. Speak to me, dear, speak to me. Let me hear you whisper, 'I love you.' Just that. Let me take that home with me, that I may be sure I am awake, and that it has all really happened. Lyra!" he breaks off, with a swift change of voice, the change from passionate pleading, avowal, to sudden fear, dread.

For, instead of raising her face to his, and murmuring her confession of responsive love, she has shrunk away from him, has somehow or other drawn at arm's-length, and with her palms pressed against his breast, keeps him away from her.

"Lyra, what is it? Come to me, dearest."

"No, no!" she pants, white to the lips, her eyes full of an intense agony, an intense despair. "No, no! I—I can not—I—I dare not, must not! Let me go! Oh, don't speak again—not a word! If—if you love me"—her voice breaks—"let me go without another word! It is more than I can bear! Oh, I can not bear it!"

He still holds her hands and looks down at her, his face as white as hers, his eyes full of stern questioning.

"Lyra," he says, hoarsely, "have I been living in a fool's paradise? Have I been deceiving myself? I—God help me!—I thought you loved me. That day—you remember—I could have been sure. Do you mean that—that—I was mistaken, that you did not care for me?"

She turns her eyes away; she can not lie to that extent, can not foreswear sacred love so basely.

"You did love me," he says, with a sudden, swift return of hope. "Why, then—ah!" He stops, and draws a long breath of doubt and pain. "Do you mean me to understand that—that you do so no longer? Is that the reason of your coolness? Speak out. For God's sake, don't beat about the bush! Do you love me no longer, Lyra?"

She looks round piteously, and up at the placid moon, that seems to smile at her misery.

"Is that it?" he demands, almost fiercely.

She does not reply, but her silence is answer enough.

He drops her hands and turns away, that she may not see his agony. Then, with still averted face, he says:

"It—it serves me right. Yes, I'm rightly punished. I don't wonder at it. How could any woman go on loving the man who behaved as I behaved? God! what a cur I must have seemed that day! For you did love me till—till you heard that I belonged to some one else. And now"—he laughs bitterly—"I am free, and it is too late."

"Too late!" breaks from her white lips.

But it is of her own mad deed, of her own fetters, she is thinking—of that vile marriage in the ruined church.

He groans and leans against the rail.

"I might have guessed it," he says, more to himself than to her. "Well, I deserve it."

She moves away from him, with weak, uncertain steps, to the open window.

"Good-bye," he says, hoarsely. "Say good-bye, Lyra."

She turns her face to him—it is well for her that he is not looking, or she would not have been allowed to go—and her lips move, but no sound comes.

When he turns, she is there no longer.

She pauses for a moment in the drawing-room, clutching a chair to steady herself, to wait for sufficient strength; then she goes up to her own room, locks the door, and flings herself face downward on the bed.

How long she lies there, with the words "Too late!" ring-

ing through her aching brain, she knows not; but after awhile she rises, and with trembling hands begins to undress.

As she does so, she sees a letter and a paper lying on the table.

Mechanically she takes them up, as mechanically opens the letter and reads it.

It is in a crabbed, half-taught handwriting; it is from Griffith.

She reads it through once, twice, before its meaning, its full significance, reaches her benumbed brain; then, with a cry, she drops the letter, and, throwing her arms up, falls prone on the thick Turkey carpet, the letter fluttering down like a wounded bird and resting on her bosom.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

WHEN Lyra came to, her eyes fell upon the letter lying on her bosom. She staggered to her feet, and, as one who is eager to convince herself of the reality of a message whose import is life or death, reread it eagerly.

It was in the crabbed and half-taught handwriting of Griffith, and ran thus:

“DEAR MISS LYRA,—This comes saying how glad I was to hear that you were safe and happy, and that the people are kind to you. And why shouldn’t they be?”

“All is the same here as when you left; but I have noose for you, which you must not be frightened at, though it is quite true.

“Yesterday I was down by the lite-house fishing, and I sor a crowd of men by the rocks. I rowed over, and sor them bending round a man that had been drowned and washed up by the tide. There had bin a storm for three night, and he had bin knocking about the rocks. Nearly all his clothes was torn off, and no one could know him. They said that he must have been a sailor washed overboard one of the coasters, and that he had been in the water three or four days. I helped to carry him into the lite-house. Now, while I was carrying him, I noticed that, on a little bit of the coat that was left, there was a button that I seemed to remember. It was one of those shiny buttons, cut like a star; it was like the buttons on the coat of that man Geoffrey Barle.”

Lyra held the letter away from her and shuddered.

“I have never seen any other buttons like it, and it startled me. When we had got him into the room in the lite-house,



the men examined him, and one of them pulled a pocket-book out of the rags of the coat. I'd seen a pocket-book like that in Mister Barle's hands, and I asked them to let me look at it. They opened it, and there was money it—a great lot of bank-notes. They said there was five hundred pounds. They was all wet, and had to be dried before the fire before they could be counted. I suppose I looked a bit scared, for they asked me if I knew him. I looked at him; but no one could know him—not his own mother—as he lie there. I sed, 'No, I did not know him;' but I sor that he had got the same light-colored 'air like Mister Barle. Then I went home. I went to Barnstaple and quietly made inquiries. I found that he was not in Barnstaple—not at any of the hotels. I went to a porter I knew at the station, and asked him if he'd seen the sort of man Mister Barle is on the nite he left the cottage and I chased him, and the porter said no, and that he was sure no one like that went up to London that night; because he was seeing his sweetheart off, and noticed everybody on the platform. So, dear Miss Lyra, I am sure that the man I sor lying ded at the lite-house was that Mr. Barle. He must have fallen into the river. I don't know what passed between you that nite; but I know that you 'ated him and was afeard of him. So, now you need not be afeard of him any more, becos he is dead. I send you the noosepaper where you can rede all about the body. They are all agreed that it was a sea-captain coming home with his money, and there is no fuss—you know there are so many captains and sailors washed up on our shore.

"So, now you know that he is ded, and I am glad, for I hated him.

"And now, dear Miss Lyra, I must say what I said when you went away: if you are not happy, you will come back. It is quite different here without you. All of us—Carlo and the pigeons and the fowls, all miss you. So, come back when you feel like, and soon. No more from your survant,

"GRIFFITH."

With feverish hands Lyra tore the wrapper from the paper, and read the account of the finding of the body and the inquest. It minutely described the appearance of the body, the coat, the pocket-book and its contents, and it drew the conclusion that the unknown was some passenger or captain in one of the coasters, who had fallen overboard.

She read and reread this until every word seemed graven on her brain; then, with her hands pressed to her brow, she paced the room, trying to realize the fact that death had set

her free from the bonds which Geoffrey Barle had cast round her.

Not for one moment did any doubt of the identity of the body occur to her. The coat button, the pocket-book, were irrefutable evidence.

She remembered the thick white fog on that awful night. She knew that nothing was easier than for a man, a stranger, to slip on the steep river-bank and fall into the tide. In the event of his not being able to swim, he would inevitably be drowned. The outgoing tide would wash him out to the bar, and the body, beaten against the rocks by the wild waves, would soon be rendered unrecognizable.

A shuddering horror took possession of her as she pictured the unhappy man's fate—a horror that for a time almost prevented her realizing that his tragic death had brought her freedom.

“Geoffrey Barle is dead—Geoffrey Barle is dead!” seemed to ring in her ears, accompanied by the swish of the tide against the rocks.

Not for one moment did she think of Lord Dane. All her thoughts were concentrated on the tragedy set forth in the letter and paper which were clinched in her hands.

She, who had been wife only in name, wedded by stealth and cunning, was now a wife no longer, a slave no longer, but free.

For the rest of the night she lay quite still, but with her eyes fixed on the window, in which the moonlight passed to darkness, and the darkness to the bright and glorious dawn.

When the dressing-bell rang, she knew that she could not rise and go down and face the other two women. She knew that the reflection of the tragedy was still in her face, in her eyes. An hour later there came a knock at the door, and Lady Theodosia's maid entered.

“My lady sent to ask how you are, miss,” she said. “Oh, dear!” she broke off, looking pityingly at Lyra's white face and startled eyes. “Then you were hurt, too, last night, miss, after all?”

Lyra shook her head.

“No,” she said; “I was not hurt; but I have been awake all night. Please say that I will come down presently. No, do not bring me any tea. I could not take anything.”

The maid softly lowered the blinds, and departed, and Lyra closed her eyes, and at last fell asleep.

She woke with the consciousness of some one's presence, and

found Mrs. Leslie standing beside her. She started up on her elbow and put her hand to her head.

"I—I have been dreaming!" she cried.

Then her eyes fell upon the letter and paper on the pillow, and she fell back with a sigh.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Leslie, "you are sure you were not hurt last night? Mary quite frightened me by her description of you, but you are not looking so white now as she said she found you."

"No, no. I am quite well," said Lyra, "and I will get up at once. I am afraid it is very late."

"It is one o'clock, but it doesn't matter in the very least. You must not get up unless you are quite well, though—"

Lyra sat up and looked at her.

"Though what?" she asked. "What is the matter?"

For she saw by Mrs. Leslie's face that something had happened. Had they discovered her secret? Had they heard of the tragedy of Geoffrey Barle's death?

Mrs. Leslie sunk into a chair.

"Something happened?" she echoed, with a rueful laugh.

"Indeed there has! Last night's business has brought about a catastrophe. Don't look so frightened, my dear. After all, I suppose, it is not so very terrible. It is only that Lord Dane and Lady Theodosia's engagement is broken off."

"Lord Dane—Lady Theodosia—broken off!" faltered Lyra.

"Yes," Mrs. Leslie sighed; then laughed, but still rather ruefully. "Something must have occurred between them in connection with that upset last night. Do you know what it was, my dear?"

Lyra hung her head.

"Ah! I see you do. Well, I won't ask you any questions. Anyway, the result is that Lady Theodosia is to marry Martin Fanshawe instead of Lord Dane."

"Marry Mr. Fanshawe!" was all Lyra could say.

"Yes. He has been over here this morning and proposed to her, and she has accepted him. They have gone out together as—as coolly as if there was no such person as Lord Dane in the world. It's all right, of course; no woman ought to marry one man while she is in love with another; but it is a sad blow to the earl. Though," she added, with a slightly puzzled expression, "he does not seem so cut up by the breaking off of the match as on Lord Dane's account. He is here, my dear."

"Here? Lord Dane?" said Lyra, the color coming into the white face.



"No; the earl," said Mrs. Leslie. "He has been here for the last two hours." She paused a moment; then, from the window where she stood with her back to Lyra, she added: "He is waiting to see you."

The crimson flooded Lyra's face, and her heart seemed to stand still.

"To see me? Oh, no! You must be mistaken, Mrs. Leslie."

Mrs. Leslie came up to the bed and smiled gravely.

"I have seen the earl; he is waiting to see you."

"But—but why? Oh! do you know?"

"No," replied Mrs. Leslie, "I do not know; but I think I can guess." She drew the beautiful head to her bosom. "Why are you so frightened, my dear?"

"Why? If you only knew!" faltered Lyra. "Ah, I can not see him! I can not tell why he should wish to see me. Help me, Mrs. Leslie! Tell him—"

Mrs. Leslie shook her head.

"You must see him, Lyra," she said, quietly. "If not to-day, to-morrow. I know nothing. All is so confused and sudden that I am bewildered; but I can form half a guess, and— Yes, you must see him; I will tell him that he may come to-morrow?"

Lyra shook her head.

"No," she said; "I will come down now. It will soon be over."

Mrs. Leslie insisted on helping her to dress, and then accompanied her down-stairs.

"He is in Theodosia's *boudoir*," she said. "You will not be interrupted." Then she opened the door and said: "I have brought Miss Chester, Lord Starminster," and closed the door softly upon them.

The earl rose from a chair and came across the room, and took Lyra's hand and bent over it.

"You are very kind to see me, my dear young lady," he said. "I fear"—she could feel his grave eyes on her face—"that the effort has caused you inconvenience? I trust you were not hurt in last night's accident?"

Lyra's lips formed, "No."

The earl led her to a chair, and seated himself beside her.

"Dane assured me that you were not," he said. "Miss Chester, there shall be no beating about the bush between us. There is something in your face which encourages me to be frank and direct. I have come to speak to you of my son."

Lyra raised her eyes with a troubled wonder and questioning.

"Of—of Lord Dane?" she said.

The earl inclined his head, his white hands clasped over the top of his common but serviceable oak walking-stick.

"Yes, my dear. When Dane came home last night, he told me all that had passed."

Lyra began to tremble.

"He does not usually make me his confidant. Indeed, Dane, with all his boyishness, is somewhat reserved. But I found him—well, very much upset, and heard that he had given orders to his servant to make preparations for a long journey and absence from England. I saw that something had happened—that something which makes a wreck of a man's life—and—I am his father, my dear—I forced his secret from him. I learned that his engagement with Lady Theodosia had ended, and that"—the old man's voice grew low—"he loved you!"

Lyra turned her head away, her bosom rose and fell.

"Do not be so distressed, my dear," he went on, "or you will make my task, a sufficiently hard one now, much harder, and well-nigh impossible; for I have come to plead for my son, Miss Chester."

"To plead for him?" Lyra breathed.

The earl bowed his head.

"Yes. He kept nothing back from me last night—laid bare his heart—I was going to say his hopes—but indeed there was only despair. My dear, I know that he loves you. I know that he once thought you loved him, and that now he knows you love him no longer."

Lyra half rose, as if she could not endure any more.

"Bear with me for a little longer," said the old man, in the voice which, when he used it, no man or woman could resist. "I know what you are thinking of me—that I am guilty of impertinence—presumption, in thus coming to you. That your refusal of my son should be accepted by both him and me as irrevocable; but, my dear child, it is not possible that you can realize how much that refusal means to him, to me, and"—he paused a moment—"to his house. You know but little of Dane, he tells me, my dear; you can not realize the strength, the force of his character. He is the soul of honor—yes, I will say that—though I and you know that in a moment of passion he forgot his honor. But it was for a moment only. But he is now free. It is Theodosia who has broken their engagement; he loves you—loves you with that fierce

yet enduring love which is characteristic of his temperament and his race."

He paused and looked straight before him.

"If you refuse to marry him, he will never marry."

A pause again.

"That means—you see how frank I have resolved to be with you, Miss Chester, that the title will go to a man—well, I will say no ill of him, excepting that I have learned that he is unworthy of it. But it means more—that my son's life will be wrecked and ruined. He will leave me, will leave England, will take to the roving, reckless life which can only have but one end. I know Dane. I know what it all means for him. I"—his voice broke for a moment—"I am an old man; he is all I have in the world. After he parts from me to-day, I—I shall see him no more!"

"Oh! no, no!" Lyra breathed, with a sob in her voice.

"But yes," said the earl, very quietly but very sadly. "His love for you will last till death. It is a way we Starminsters have;" he smiled mournfully. "Dane will not be the first whose life has gone to pieces upon the rocks of an unrequited love." He paused, and Lyra remained silent, her hands tightly clasped in her lap.

"I had great hopes, great ambitions for Dane," the earl went on, in a low voice. "I had hoped that he would have stepped into my place, that he would have endeavored to serve his country and his queen as I have humbly endeavored to do; and though I have long abandoned those hopes, still I looked forward to seeing him fill his place in the world worthily. I have looked forward to the time when I might have his children at my knee to cheer my last days, and give me assurance that my race would be worthily perpetuated. You can not guess what all this meant to me. But these hopes must all be shattered, unless"—he paused—"unless my pleading with you be successful. Miss Chester, it does not become a father to praise his son. I will not tell you that Dane is worthy of you. No man, however good, however noble, can be worthy of a good woman. But I will dare to say this, that Dane will make the woman he loves, whose love he can gain, a happy woman. Now, my dear, I have finished my prayer, for it is a prayer. I come to you to-day and ask you, beg you, to reconsider your decision. Will you refuse my prayer? Will you not try and love my son? Will you not be his wife?"

Lyra raised her head.

"You ask me to marry Lord Dane?" she said, almost inaudibly.



The earl bowed his head.

"I do, my dear child," he said, gravely, almost solemnly. Lyra's hands writhed.

"You—you know nothing of me," she said. "You speak of worthiness, my lord. How do you know that I am worthy to be Lord Dane's wife, to be—your daughter-in-law?"

The earl smiled.

"My dear, I know enough of you to feel assured on that score. I have seen the letter of the clergyman at Barnstaple, and know from that how fond and devoted a daughter you were to the father who has passed away. A good daughter makes a good and loving wife."

"He knew—nothing, nothing of me," Lyra said, huskily.

"No? I think you are mistaken. Besides, you forget that I have seen you; and—forgive an old man's vanity, my dear—but I have learned, during my long sojourn in Vanity Fair, to read faces, ay, and voices. Your face must be a very clever mask if it hide a false heart and base nature. My dear, I trust to Dane's judgment and my own. We both think you more than worthy. The doubt is on the other side; but I will not affect a doubt I do not feel. Dane loves you; he will make you a good husband."

"He, too, knows nothing," she said, almost incoherently. "If he knew—"

The earl smiled.

"Tell him—not me—if there is anything to be told, my dear," he said, with gentle dignity.

"I can not," said Lyra; "I can not marry him, my lord."

The earl took her hand and looked into her eyes.

"Do you mean that you do not love him?" he asked, his eyes watching her keenly.

The blood rushed to Lyra's face, her lips quivered as if with physical pain.

"I—I—oh, it is cruel! I can not bear it!" she broke out.

The earl pressed her hands.

"My dear, you have answered me," he said, slowly, gravely. "Why do you hesitate? Why are you so reluctant to let your heart answer me as it desires to do? Are you thinking of the difference in rank? But no, that would be a vulgarity of which I know you can not be guilty. Besides"—he smiled—"I have a shrewd suspicion that you come of a family as old as his. But it is not that you are thinking of. What is it, then?"

Lyra rose and turned from him.

"I can not tell you," she said, hoarsely.

"You shall not," he said. "I am satisfied with the knowledge that you love my son. I think, my dear"—he rose and took her hand—"that you will not refuse an old man's prayer, that you will be his wife."

As he spoke, the door opened, and Lord Dane entered. He stopped short, with the door in his hand.

"Father, you here!" he said. "Miss Chester, I came to say good-bye to Dosie."

"Yes, I am here, Dane," said the earl, still holding Lyra's hand. "I have come to plead for you."

A wave of color passed over Dane's haggard face.

"You—you should not have done that, sir," he said. "You only trouble Miss Chester."

"Do you think so?" said the earl. "Then you shall plead with her for forgiveness. Tell him, my dear, that you pardon the impertinence of an old man anxious for his son's happiness."

He raised Lyra's hand to his lips with the last word and went out.

Dane stood gnawing at his mustache and gazing at Lyra.

"Will you say good-bye to Dosie for me?" he said, at last.

Lyra made a gesture of assent; her face turned from him.

"I am sorry my father has worried you," he said. "You see, he thinks my happiness the most important thing in the world; it's a way fathers have; forgive him; forgive us both. Miss Chester, good-bye. It's not likely you will be worried by either of us again; at any rate, not by me. I leave by the afternoon train, and"—he stopped—"won't you say good-bye, Lyra"—his voice grew husky—"shake hands?"

Half turning, she held out her hand. He took it, and as if its contact had scattered his self-possession and restraint to the winds, he gripped it hard and drew her to him.

"Lyra, I can't let you go—I can't! Oh, my dear, have pity on me! Try and love me a little! Be my wife, and let me try and win back the old love!"

"No, no!" she faltered.

But she made a great mistake in letting him see her eyes. He must have read something of the love that was burning in her heart, for, with a cry of half-doubting joy, he caught her to him and held her locked in his arms.

"Lyra, my love! My dear, dear love!"

She hid her face on his shoulder with an irresistible surrender, but he raised it, and holding it in his hands, looked into her eyes.

"Lyra, you consent? Why, my darling, how cruel you have been!"

"No, no—wait!" she panted, trying to escape, but vainly, for he laughed at the denial of her lips, reading the avowal in her eyes—"wait! You do not know! Oh, Dane, you do not know! I have something to tell you. I tried to tell him. It is something you must hear before"—her voice died away—"before you ask me to be your wife!"

He laughed again.

"What is it?" he asked. "What is troubling that pure soul of yours? Is it something that I *must* know?"

"Yes," she breathed; "you must know, and when you know, you will not ask me any longer to be your wife. You will send me away."

"Really?" he said, with a smile on his lips, in his eyes. "I don't think so. What have you been doing? Murder—forgery?" He laughed aloud. "My poor Lyra, I'm afraid if you'd been guilty of breaking all the ten commandments, it wouldn't make any difference to me! It's one of those desperate cases, mine is, in which things of that kind don't count."

She shook her head and sighed, almost moaned. Oh, if he could but learn of her folly, her wickedness, from other lips than her own!

"But what nonsense this is!" he said, after a pause, during which he smoothed her hair and kissed the silken locks on her forehead. "My dear child, I know what's worrying you. You want to tell me about—about some other man?" For all his declared indifference, his voice hesitated. "That's it, isn't it?"

She hid her face on his shoulder, then tried to draw away from him.

"Let it rest there, dearest," he said, putting her head on its pillow again; "and first you listen to me, as you're bound to do—'love, honor, and obey,' don't you know? Now, look here, Lyra, if it's the sort of thing I've hinted at, don't you say any more about it—that is"—he broke off with a touch of gravity—"that is, if you are sure it is all past and done with. That he—whoever he was, confound him!—has quite gone off the scene and won't appear again."

She shuddered slightly.

"Oh, yes, yes!"

It was a prayer and a thanksgiving in one.

"Right!" he said, in his cheery way. "That's all right. Now, my dear girl, do you think—I say, do you think—that I want—expect you to confess all your past,—well, flirtations?"



A low cry escaped her.

"Ah, if it were only that!"

"Well, love affairs, if you will have it so," he said. "I say, if you expect me to listen to 'em, even you expect too much. I couldn't do it; it would drive me mad!" A momentary sternness rang in his voice, which grew gentle as he went on. "My dear, I'm as jealous as—what's his name in the play?—Othello. I should be miserable every time I thought of—of what you want to tell me. Besides"—his tone became grave and even penitent—"don't you see, dear, that—that—well, I should have something to confess, and—" He stopped; then broke out, almost fiercely: "For God's sake, let the past bury its dead, and don't let us drag its ghosts about with us. I'm content, Lyra, if you are. Tell me that you are, dear one! Tell me that you are mine from to-day, as I am—yes, I am yours—ah! yours only, my dearest, from the first moment I saw you, when you pulled me out of the Taw."

Lyra wrung her hands. What could she do? His words, "I could not bear it!" sounded like a stern warning in her heart. He had said that "if it were past and done with." Well, it was past—past and buried—gone forever. If she told him, he might—would—put her away from him, and she would lose him. His love made her weak as water—guiltily weak, if you like to have it so; his arms round her, his lips upon hers, robbed her of all strength of purpose. Yet, she tried to obey the stern dictates of her conscience.

She raised her eyes to his—so full of love, so piteous in their imploration—but before she could speak, the door opened, and Lady Theodosia and Martin Fanshawe entered. They tried to draw back, but Dane held Lyra's arm as she endeavored to spring from him, and stopped them with a word.

"You have just come in time, Dosie. How do you do, Fanshawe?" he said; and his handsome face flushed with a man's joy and triumph in the woman he has won. "Dosie, Miss Chester has just promised to be my wife."

Lady Theodosia changed color. There is always a little of the dog-in-the-manger temperament even in the best of women; but Lady Theodosia was one of the best of best women, and the feeling did not last longer than a moment or two.

"Dane!" she faltered.

Then Martin Fanshawe proved himself of the right metal. Suppressing all signs of astonishment from his clean-cut, ascetic countenance, he strode forward and held out his hand.

"I congratulate you, Lord Dane," he said, "I congratulate

you most heartily; and I wish you every happiness, my dear Miss Chester."

Dane wrung his hand.

"Thanks, old fellow. I'm not good at speech-making, but I say"—he glanced at Dosie rather whimsically—"I say 'Ditto.'"

Lady Theodosia came forward and kissed Lyra with sweet gravity.

"I am so glad!" she said. "But—but isn't it rather sudden? I don't mean that," she added quickly, and flushing, for Lyra's head drooped; but Dane burst into a laugh, then grew suddenly grave.

"Look here, Dosie, I've got to confess—confession is good for the soul, eh, Fanshawe?—Lyra and I are not—ahem!—total strangers; we had met before. Now hold on!" for Lady Theodosia's eyes opened wide. "It was my fault; I asked her not to tell; I told her to hold her tongue. Blame me if there is any blame going about." He stopped and looked queerly at Lady Theodosia, who colored. "That's all right. We met—well, not exactly in a crowd—some time ago, and—but that's a matter of detail, as you'd say, Dosie, and—"

The earl and Mrs. Leslie came into the room, and Dane turned to his father.

"I've got her forgiveness, sir," he said. "It's all right;" and he laid his hand affectionately on the old man's bent shoulders.

The earl smiled and went up to Lyra and drew her arm within his.

"Let us go into the garden, my dear," he said, with the tact for which he was famous, "and you shall tell me all about it."

Mrs. Leslie looked from one to the other with a smile.

"No wonder she fainted the night you appeared," she said to Dane.

"Yes; I had a good mind to faint myself," he retorted, dryly.

## CHAPTER XXX.

THE ill-natured philosopher who asserted that happiness was impossible in this sublunary world would have been equally disgusted and surprised if he could have known these two pairs of lovers, who, at any rate for the four following months, drank deeply of the divine cup of human joy, which, as we all know, is anticipation.

Persons in high places can, we are told, do anything, and Martin Fanshawe and Lady Theodosia were desirous of being made one as quickly as possible; but Lady Theodosia was also desirous that there should be a double wedding, "just to show that there was no ill-feeling," perhaps; and no persuasion, even of Dane's, would induce Lyra to become Viscountess Armitage before six months had elapsed. Dane, who would have liked to carry her off to church the following morning, and the earl, who also ardently desired the marriage, fought against her determination in vain.

Seeing that she was "Geoffrey Barle's" wife only in name, her refusal may seem strange and unreasonable; but she held by it even against Lady Theodosia's prayers and Martin Fanshawe's gravely just arguments; and so it was arranged that the double wedding should take place in January.

Dane declared that the delay was wicked, and even cruel, but he was not unhappy, though he growled and grumbled at intervals.

It was a lovely autumn, and, refusing all the shooting invitations, he stayed on at Starminster—much to the earl's delight—and spent his time, pendulum fashion, between there and Castle Towers.

Lyra would have left Lady Theodosia, but that demure little lady insisted upon her remaining; but as a friend, a close and loving friend, rather than "companion."

"You see, my dear," she said, "I owe you such a big debt of gratitude. If Dane had gone off to the wilds of Africa, or wherever it is he wanted to go, I should have been rendered miserable by the reflection that I had ruined his life, and made him and the dear earl most wretched. You just saved me from that, and every time I look at you I feel relieved and grateful."

"And not at all jealous?" put in Mrs. Leslie, archly.

"No," responded Lady Theodosia, gravely. "Not jealous, though I've every excuse. I can quite see how impossible it was for Dane to go on—caring for me after he had seen Lyra."

"Oh, come; I don't think you are altogether a freak of nature, my dear," remarked Mrs. Leslie. "Neither does Martin."

Notwithstanding the impatience of the two men, the months that followed were very happy ones. There was plenty of game at Starminster, and the earl, eager to keep Dane by his side, filled the huge house with a party of shooting men and pleasant women.

At first Lyra shrunk from the ordeal of meeting this sample



of the fashionable world, but to her unbounded surprise, she found not only that it was a very pleasant and amiable sample, but that it was unanimous in accepting her and making much of her. In fact, Lyra Chester, the solitary maid of the Taw Valley, became extremely popular. The men raved about her beauty, and the women, who are much harder to please, praised her modesty.

“ ’Pon my soul, Dane is a devilish lucky fellow!” declared Wally Vavasour, who was supposed to be the supreme judge of feminine worth. “ Miss Chester is not only the most beautiful girl I know, but she is the only girl I ever met who doesn’t know that she is pretty. I wonder why she always dresses in black, or half mourning? I know it suits her—but there! anything would suit her, donchaknow.”

To adequately describe Dane’s pride and glory in his lovely *fiancée* would be impossible. As Mrs. Leslie remarked, he went about like a conquering hero, or like a man who had discovered the biggest diamond on earth, or the Philosopher’s Stone. It was, she declared, a perfect treat to watch him as he danced with her, or, at a distance, looked on while she danced with some one else.

“ If ever a marriage was made in heaven—and I am told that some of them are made elsewhere—theirs will be. It is a revival of the Arcadian period, when all lovers were true and love reigned triumphant.”

And through it all, under the admiring gaze of the men, and the sometimes envious glances of the women, Lyra bore herself perfectly. Her secret—the awful secret that in the silent watches of the night hovered like a loathsome specter over her dreams, kept her humble in her elevation.

For the balls and other splendid functions she cared little, though she was the acknowledged queen of them, and she was never so happy as when she was seated by Dane’s side on the box of the drag and behind the chestnuts that ran away that never-to-be-forgotten night, or when she was with the old earl in the library, reading aloud to him or copying one of his speeches for the press.

Between Lyra and the old nobleman a very warm affection had sprung up and flourished, and once, after dinner, he remarked to Dane:

“ Dane, if I had married a woman like Lyra, I should have been Prime Minister before this.”

And Dane had laughed with proud satisfaction.

The months, enlivened by picnics, balls, and shooting-parties, slid away, and one morning in January, when the sun

shone on the snow and turned the frost on the hedge-rows to diamonds, which outshone even the famous Starminster tiara, Dane and Lyra, and Lady Theodosia and Martin Fanshawe stood before the altar of the small, ivy-grown church in the Starminster grounds, and were respectively made man and wife.

With a smile of joy and triumph, Dane pressed Lyra's arm to his heart, as he led her to the vestry to sign the register.

"Mine at last, dearest!" he murmured.

Quiet as the double wedding was, for Lady Theodosia and Lyra had stipulated for a really private ceremony, there was a large crowd in the vestry, and Wally Vavasour, who acted as best man, was only heard by Lyra when, as he led her to the clerk who sat beside the register, he said:

"He wants to know whether he is to put 'spinster' or 'widow,' Miss Chester. Good! isn't it? I suppose the poor beggar is obliged to put the question."

A smile rose to Lyra's face. Her great happiness had wiped out, for a time, the memory of that other wedding in the ruined church of St. Mark's by the Taw. Then the smile faded and she turned white.

Dane saw the change; his bridegroom's eyes were constantly on her face.

"What is it, dearest?" he murmured. "Are you faint? It's this awful crowd. Why don't some of you get outside?"

"No, no!" she said; and, setting her face into a semblance of composure, she signed the register.

Then she dropped the pen and turned to him with a strange look in her eyes.

"Remember," she panted, in a whisper, "you would not let me tell you!"

He scarcely heard her; every one was chattering as they pressed forward to sign their names as witnesses.

"What did you say, dear?" he asked.

She drew a deep sigh as she looked up at him.

"Nothing," she breathed—"nothing."

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

"DON'T tell me there is no such thing as happiness in the world! Do you think I have forgotten my honey-moon?" exclaims the heroine of a modern French comedy; and Lyra might have echoed the retort.

It would indeed have been strange if she had not been happy, for the gods had lavished their choicest gifts upon her

—youth, beauty, rank, wealth, and the love of a man who carried her heart on his bosom!

At times her great happiness almost made her tremble, for it seemed to her that no human being had a right to so full a cup of joy as that which the Fates had filled for her. She forgot that she had had a fair share of trouble and sorrow, and that it was time the wheel of fortune turned her way.

Like a couple of school-children out for a holiday, she and Dane wandered about the sunny south—which, by the way, does not always earn its complimentary title—making a short stay in some places, a long one in others, just as their fancies prompted.

To Lyra, who had only read of the beautiful places and noble cities of the Continent, the days seemed to pass in an endless series of delicious dreams, and in her intense enjoyment Dane found a pleasure so new as to be almost startling.

If some ingenious chemist could put up Happiness in bottles and retail it at one shilling and three half-pence, like their patent medicines, what an immense fortune he would make!

Happiness brought the color to Lyra's cheek, the light to her eyes, the smile to her lips; so transformed her that Dane, who was absurdly proud of his wife's beauty, occasionally asked himself whether this radiantly happy girl could be the same pale, weary-looking woman who had fallen fainting into his arms that night at Castle Towers.

Though they had resolved to travel about with all the simplicity and privacy of—say, a city clerk and his bride—their presence in the large cities was speedily known to the English colony which may be found in every continental town, large or small, and very soon after their arrival at a hotel cards fluttered down upon them, conveying invitations to dinners and “At Homes.” Most of these hospitalities she and Dane declined, but sometimes the invitations came from old friends of his or the earl, and a refusal was impossible; and they would, with mutual bewailings and sympathy, go to Lady So-and-so's dinner-party or “small and early;” and wherever they went, Lyra, to quote Dane, “scored heavily.” Her loveliness would have made her remarkable and welcome, but that mixture of sweet, womanly dignity and gentleness which had won Dane's heart the first time he had seen her, conquered all with whom she came in contact; and wherever she went she made friends and created a sensation which was not long in finding expression in the modern society journals.

Dane laughed at the complimentary paragraphs which *Galvani*, the continental newspaper, copied from the English



journals; but I have a shrewd suspicion that he was not altogether displeased at the fame into which his beautiful wife was all unconsciously stepping.

"I don't know whether you are very keenly set upon being one of the 'leading women'—I think that's the proper term, but I'm open to correction—but I'm afraid you're in for it, whether you like it or not, my dear," he said one morning as he lolled back in a deck-chair on a balcony in Rome, smoking the after-breakfast cigarette, and looking through *Galignani* with that perfect enjoyment of sheer laziness which only the happy can experience.

Lyra, leaning over the rail, gazing at the great dome, toward which one's eyes are constantly drawn wherever in Rome one may happen to be, looked at him with a smile of interrogation.

"What is a 'leading woman,' and why am I in danger of becoming anything so dreadful as it sounds?" she asked.

He laughed and regarded her through half-closed eyes, with the expression which a man's face wears when he is looking at the woman he loves and—which is a very different thing—admires. "You'll soon know, I fancy," he replied. "A leading woman is—well, the Duchess of Torchester is one of 'em. You've heard of her?"

"Of course; everybody seems to know her and talk of her. One would think she was the greatest lady in the world, with one exception."

"Oh, no," said Dane; "there are three or four as great as she is. They lead the fashion; their word, in their little world, is absolute law. To be admitted to their friendship is to be stamped with the hall mark of society. In short, they are the rulers of the 'hupper sircle,' as Thackeray calls it."

Lyra laughed.

"How terrible! As if such an humble and insignificant individual as I should ever become so powerful a despot! My lord the king is pleased to chaff his servant."

"Oh, no; listen to this," he said:

"The Viscount and Viscountess Armitage are enjoying a long honey-moon in the south. We hear that her ladyship is winning golden opinions wherever she goes, and that London may prepare itself for a surprise which will prove an absolute conquest. Lady Dane, as those who enjoy the inestimable privilege of her friendship are fond of calling her, is not only one of the most beautiful, but one of the most fascinating of English women, and her wedding-trip with her popular husband partakes, in no small measure, of a triumphal progress.

We prophesy that this coming—and, strange to say, her first—London season will be an immense success. The viscount and viscountess are at present in Rome, and Rome is raving about her.’

“What do you think of that?”

“I think it is very impertinent,” said Lyra, with heightened color. “How dare they print such nonsense about any one?”

Dane laughed and seated himself more comfortably.

“My sweetly innocent child, they mean it as a compliment; they mean to be pleasant. If I were to go and kick the fellow who writes it, he would be a great deal more astonished than aggrieved. Why, half the women we know would be jerked into the seventh heaven of delight if such a paragraph were written about them!”

Lyra looked slightly incredulous.

“Oh, Dane, I can’t think you are right! But it is all nonsense. It isn’t there at all, and you are inventing it to tease me.”

Dane laughed outright.

“My poor girl,” he said, with mock gravity. “There is something appalling in your lack of women’s chief attribute—vanity. Some of these days I shall wake up to find I haven’t married a human woman, but one of those unnatural—what d’ye call it?—water-sprites—angels, don’t you know, and I shall see you spread your wings and vanish from my sight.”

“I shall vanish from your sight without any wings, sir, if you talk such terrible nonsense,” she remarked; but added, in the woman’s undertone, which is so significant: “But I am glad if you think me—pretty, Dane.” She leaned toward him and let her finger-tip touch his short, wavy hair. “I suppose every woman must like to seem well favored in one man’s sight.”

Dane laughed.

“Be comforted, my dear,” he said. “I think you are tolerably good-looking; but as to one man’s”—he smiled with affected ruefulness—“that is coming it a bit strong, seeing that all the men are, as this newspaper cad says, raving about you. I suppose there is safety in numbers, otherwise I should be jealous. As it is, I am only—well, amused and flattered. Only yesterday that handsome boy, Clarence Hoare, almost went so far as to ask me what the devil I had done to deserve such a peerless creature.”

Lyra smiled and colored.

"He is a very foolish boy," she said. "I will tell him so if you like, Dane."

"My dear girl, he would not be a bit abashed, and for goodness' sake, don't hurt his feelings on my account. Besides, if you send away all the men who admire you, and are perfectly convinced that they are in love with you, I sha'n't have a friend left."

Lyra laughed.

"Really, you don't deserve any kindness at my hands, Dane; and I've half a mind not to let you read Dosie's letter; it came this morning."

"Have a whole mind, my dear," he retorted, blandly. "I know Dosie's letters of old"—he pulled himself up and bit his mustache, but Lyra did not appear to notice his momentary embarrassment. "What does she say? I could bear a few elegant extracts."

Lyra pulled the letter out of her pocket.

"Well, they've got back. They were obliged to cut the honey-moon short, because the bishop has given Martin the living at Castle Towers."

"Oh!" grunted Dane, as if he had not had a great deal to do with the presentation. "That's all right."

"And they're very happy—awfully happy—and she has discovered that Martin is even better than she thought him."

"Poor man! Humph! you won't be able to say that of me, my dear."

"No, indeed! And here is a message from the earl. Shall I read it? No; I won't. It's—it's too complimentary. But, oh, Dane, how good and kind he is to me!" and there was a tremor in her voice.

"Read! Read!" as they shout in the House of Commons," he said, with indolent insistence.

"Must I? Well, here it is: 'Tell Lyra, that though I do not wish to curtail their honey-moon, I shall be rejoiced to see them back, for it is very lonely here without her. In truth, I miss her badly. You may say that I am having Highfield got ready for them.'"

Dane looked up.

"Phew!" he murmured. "Highfield! That's good of the guv'nor."

"What is it, Dane?"

"Well, it's the largest of the country places, excepting Starminster, and just near enough to the Hall to be convenient. That's just like him! He never does things by halves. You'll like the place, I think. Lyra. It is not so large as



Starminster, but it's 'mighty pretty,' as the Irishman said of his favorite pig. But go on."

Lyra went on with the extract from the letter.

"'But tell her that I will not let them go and live there, unless they promise to keep a room for an old man, who will crave for a quiet corner in the house of his daughter, when, weary with the turmoil and clatter of noisy politics, he longs for rest and the companionship of those he loves.'"

The tears came into Lyra's eyes as she read.

Dane nodded with intense satisfaction.

"'Poor old guv'nor! Tell him we'll keep an attic for him, and that he shall always have a chop in the library. Anything else?'"

Lyra ran down the closely written lines.

"'Oh, yes; this, Dane: 'Please tell Dane that we are all rather anxious about Chandos.'"

"'They don't say so!'" remarked Dane, ironically. "'What's the matter with him?'"

"'Dane will remember,' Lyra went on reading, 'that he sent no reply to the invitation to the wedding, nor any present, which seemed strange at the time.'"

"'Humph! it didn't to me, nor the non-appearance of the present,'" growled Dane.

"'And the other day Martin called at Chandos's rooms, and was surprised to find that he had not been seen there for months. The landlady showed him a pile of letters—the invitation was among them—which had come for Chandos, and said that she had not heard from him for months, and did not know his address. The earl thinks that something may have happened to him.'"

"'No cause for alarm; the devil takes care of his own,'" muttered Dane.

"'What did you say?'" asked Lyra.

"'Nothing of any consequence.'"

"'Who is Chandos?'" she asked, as she put the letter away.

"'Chandos is my cousin—Chandos Armitage,'" said Dane.

"'Don't happen to have a match in your pocket, my dear, do you?'"

As a matter of course, Lyra fetched a box from the room, lighted a match and held it to his cigarette, and then, equally as a matter of course, held her cheek for payment.

"'Your cousin? I never heard of him.'"

"'I dare say. No end of aunts and cousins you haven't heard of yet, thank your stars; though most of 'em, I'm

bound to say, are better worth knowing than Master Chandos."

"What is the matter with him?" Lyra asked.

She was leaning over the balcony, looking dreamily again at the great dome, which stood out from the clear blue of the Italian sky. A distant bell was ringing; the sun, the Roman sun, which turns grim winter into bright summer, shone on the crowd beneath; on the market women in their white caps and scarlet skirts; on the grave priests and monks and black-robed Sisters of Mercy going "about their Father's business;" on the street boys yelling their papers and fruit and flowers. She asked the question with but faint interest.

"A great deal is the matter with him, morally. He is not a nice man by any means, though I'm afraid a great many persons, especially women, think otherwise. He is supposed to be very clever, literary, musical, and all the rest of it; but—well, he isn't an honor or credit to the family, and if it is true that he has disappeared from civilization—well, civilization is to be congratulated."

"Poor fellow!" said Lyra.

Dane took the cigarette from his mouth and stared at her.

"Beg pardon?"

"I said 'Poor fellow!'" said Lyra, softly. "Don't you pity anybody who is like your cousin Chandos, Dane? It must be so bad to be wicked; one must be so unhappy; to feel that you have spent your life, the dear, sweet life which God has blessed you with, in doing harm to others—oh, Dane, one must be wretched!"

Dane smiled, but gravely.

"That's like one of Dosie's speeches," he said. "After all, one good woman's like another, I suppose."

Lyra laughed, but gravely, also.

"You mustn't compare me with Dosie," she said. "Dosie is an angel, and I am only—"

"A rather prepossessing young woman," he put in. "Yes, that was a very nice bit of moral sentiment of yours, my child, but I'm afraid it won't wash. I'm afraid Chandos isn't at all wretched. He thinks he is making a jolly good thing out of his life, though it isn't particularly sweet, and certainly isn't blessed. It's a mistake to imagine that the wicked are unhappy—at any rate, while they're young, and are 'a-going of it.' They flourish as the bay-tree, don't you know, and Chandos flourishes particularly. Bless your innocence, he is worshiped by no end of people—who don't know him. As to anything having happened to him, don't you believe it. He's

all right, and up to mischief somewhere. He'll turn up fresh and smiling—like Hamlet's idea of a villain—and laugh at 'em for thinking he was drowned—or hanged."

"Dane!" murmured Lyra, rebukingly. "Perhaps he is not so bad as you have painted him."

"Perhaps not," he assented, laconically; "but to do his portrait correctly, you'd want a heap of lampblack, I can tell you. But don't let's talk about him; he spoils my cigarette; bad taste in the mouth. Long may he stay away, wherever he is. Well, I suppose I ought to get up and go out. It's about the time young Clarence drops in, isn't it? And the poor boy looks so aggrieved if I'm at home that I feel quite guilty—like an interloper."

Lyra laughed.

"We'll both go," she said.

"Better not; or if he finds you're out, he'll pitch himself over the balcony. Heartless coquette as you are, I imagine you wouldn't care to have the lad's blood on your head."

"You deserve to have my hands on your ears," she retorted; and she bent toward him, to be caught, kissed, and held until she freed herself.

"Really, Dane, your behavior is outrageous! You forget that those windows in the palace opposite rake this balcony."

"Let 'em; who cares?" he retorted, as he rose and stretched himself.

His yawn was cut short by an exclamation from Lyra. She had returned to the railing, and was looking down at something or some one below.

"What's the matter? Fire?"

"Oh, Dane, there is such a—I was going to say handsome man standing on the pavement opposite! But he is not so handsome as—as singular and distinguished-looking. Sec?"

He leaned over beside her and looked lazily across the street. Then he said:

"By George! it's—yes, it *is* St. Aubyn!"

"You know him?"

"Rather; was at college with him. Best fellow alive. Poor devil!"

"Why do you say that?" she asked.

As she spoke, the man raised his head and looked up at them. His face was a handsome one, but was spoiled by a weary, listless look which impressed one by its intense sadness. He was dark, and the hair at his temples was touched with silver, though he was still a young man. The air of distinction which had attracted Lyra's attention struck a keen



note for the most casual observer. Few men, and fewer women, ever passed him with a single glance.

His listless, melancholy eye wandered along the house fronts till it reached the balcony; then, as he recognized Dane, his face was lighted up by a singularly sweet smile; but as he saw the lovely woman by his side, it disappeared, and, slightly raising his hat, he walked on.

"Confound it! he's gone," exclaimed Dane. "He saw you."

"Saw me!" said Lyra, open-eyed. "Why should I frighten him away? What do you mean, Dane?"

He laughed, but with a touch of disappointment.

"Oh, St. Aubyn is a woman-hater!" he said.

"A woman-hater?" echoed Lyra, who had never met nor heard of this phenomenon.

Dane nodded and sighed.

"Yes—poor old chap! That man's history is a sad one. He is one of the best fellows that ever walked the earth. Fact. He and I were the closest friends."

"Then I am sure he must have been a good fellow, Dane," murmured Lyra.

"Thank you, dear. Well, he was one of those men who would lay down their lives for a friend. No end of scrapes—scrapes that would have floored me—he has got me out of. Always stood by me like a—like a brick!"

He smoked in silence for a moment or two, evidently recalling old college days; then he went on:

"After he left college he fell in love. She was a handsome girl enough, but—well, everybody but poor St. Aubyn could see what sort of a girl she was. At that time he was a long way off the title."

"What is he?" asked Lyra.

"The Earl of St. Aubyn. There were two, if not three, between him and the title, and she refused him. She was as pretty as paint—one of those fair girls, with hair like gold, don't you know—gold hair and blue eyes, innocent as a child, but in appearance only. He was terribly cut up when she refused him, and when the two or three lives between him and the title gave out, he was as indifferent about it as if he'd only come into a couple of hundred pounds. I think it was I myself who plucked up cheek enough to advise him to try his luck with the fair Lilian again and—well, of course she accepted him—swore she'd loved him all the time."

"Oh, Dane!"

"My dear"—he smiled—"all women are not so single-

mindful and unmercenary as you. Well, they were married. It was all love—red-hot love—on his side. There was no woman like her. He only *lived* while he was with her. He was in the clouds, all abroad, when he was away from her. He used to talk about her to me—and to other fellows, I dare say—just like a boy over his first love. Then one day—well, one day she left him. He discovered that she had not only deceived him after, but before his marriage. What is the matter, dear?" he broke off to ask, for Lyra was trembling, and her face had gone white.

It was a moment or two before she could answer:

"Nothing, Dane. Go on."

"It was the old story," he continued, as he lighted another cigarette. "There had been a lover before their marriage; he had reappeared afterward, and the fair, golden-haired Lilian—who was simply a goddess in the eyes of her husband, a type of perfect womanhood—had chucked up everything—a devoted husband, her good name, rank, wealth—oh! everything, for the sake of a dirty scoundrel—"

He stopped and smoked fiercely.

Lyra's hand slid along the rail of the balcony until it reached his arm and fastened on it timidly.

"Oh, poor man, poor man!"

"Yes, you may well say that. Poor devil, he was like a madman. In fact, I think he was out of his mind for a time. He followed the man and thrashed him, almost under her eyes. Served him right—pity he didn't shoot *her*. Then he disappeared for a long time. When he came back—well, he was as you see him, no more like the old St. Aubyn than I'm like that carved water-spout. She'd broke him, body and soul—stone-broke him. He told me that there was only one thing he regretted, and that was that the scoundrel hadn't shot him. He's the last of the St. Aubyns; the title dies with him; and he's not at all likely to marry again. Likely! Well, he hates women—simply hates them, poor old chap!"

Lyra was silent a moment.

"No wonder!" she said; and there was a depth of feeling, of tender, forgiving sympathy in her voice. "Oh, poor man, poor man! How wicked, how vile she must have been!"

Dane nodded.

"Yes; when you women are bad—well, you *are* bad; and when you are good"—he put his arm around her and pressed her to him—"you *are* good! Halloo! there he is, coming back again. Just draw out of sight, dear—just for a moment."

Lyra sunk into the deck-chair and pressed her hands over her eyes. She heard Dane call out:

"Halloo! St. Aubyn! Come up, old chap!"

"Will he come?" she asked in a whisper, as if the man of whom she was speaking could hear her.

"Yes; I think so, if you keep out of sight. Yes; he nods; he is coming."

"I will go," said Lyra, after a moment or two; but as she rose to make her escape, footsteps were heard on the stairs, and the valet appearing at the glass door of the room behind the balcony announced Lord St. Aubyn.

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

LORD ST. AUBYN responded to Dane's greeting with the same warmth with which it was accorded, and the two men held each other's hands and looked into each other's eyes as only old and tried friends can.

"My dear old man," Dane exclaimed, "I'm delighted to see you! What a rum thing that you should have been passing just as I happened to be sitting here! Lyra, this is a very old chum of mine, Lord St. Aubyn."

In an instant the warmth disappeared from St. Aubyn's face, and in a cold, reserved manner he bowed to Lyra. For a moment or two his sad, weary eyes rested on her face; but though he could not have failed to note her beauty, it did not strike a spark of admiration out of him.

"I did not know you were married, Dane," he said, coldly.

Dane laughed.

"Scarcely aware of it myself, old chap. Honey-moon, you know."

Lord St. Aubyn inclined his head and took the chair which Dane put for him.

"I congratulate you," he said, simply, seriously, without a trace of the conventional smile.

Lyra would have taken flight, but that she feared that by doing so she would convey to Lord St. Aubyn the knowledge that she and Dane had been discussing him; but she withdrew as far as the balcony would allow, and returned to her contemplation of the street.

Dane started on the usual series of questions: How long had he been in Rome? How long was he going to remain? What hotel was he staying at? And Lord St. Aubyn made his replies in his grave but musical voice which had impressed Lyra rather favorably.



"I am only passing through, and may go to-morrow. I am staying at the Hotel Coronna."

"Oh, you can't go to-morrow!" said Dane, in his down-right fashion. "Why, it's ages since I saw you, and I'm not going to let you bolt off like that. You've nowhere in particular to go, I suppose?"

Lord St. Aubyn made a slight gesture in the negative.

"Very well, then. You just stay on, for a bit, at any rate. There are a heap of people here—there always are—but there is no one I know particularly, and I was just wishing that I could just run across a chum."

Lord St. Aubyn glanced at Lyra, and Dane laughed.

"You think that I'm not very complimentary to my wife?" he said. "Oh, but that's all right. We haven't begun to bore each other yet, but, all the same, an old chum is welcome. Ask him to dine with us to-night, Lyra."

Lyra turned her head.

"We shall be very pleased if you will, Lord St. Aubyn," she said.

"Thank you, Lady Armitage, but I am sorry to say I am engaged," he said, quietly but promptly, and in a tone that settled the matter.

"What a nuisance!" said Dane. "Never mind; we'll book you for to-morrow."

"To-morrow I—" began St. Aubyn; but Dane interrupted him quickly.

"Well, well, we won't bother you. What do you say to a stroll? Lyra, get your hat on, and come with us."

Lyra glanced at the sad, somber face.

"I have some letters to write," she said. "You must go without me this morning."

And as she spoke she fancied that Lord St. Aubyn looked relieved. But Dane declined to accept the excuse.

"Oh, nonsense! Write 'em this afternoon. The post doesn't go out until the evening. Run away and put your pinafore on, there's a good girl."

There was a silence between the two men for a moment or two after Lyra had left them. Then St. Aubyn said:

"And so you are married, Dane?"

Dane nodded.

"Yes, to the best, the dearest—"

Then he stopped. St. Aubyn was scarcely the man to appreciate marital rhapsodies. No doubt he, too, had thought his wife "the best, the dearest," etc.

"She is very beautiful," he said, slowly. "I wish you every happiness, Dane."

"Thanks, old man," responded Dane, and quickly got away from the subject.

They chatted over old times and mutual acquaintances until Lyra reappeared. Then Dane went off to put on his boots and overcoat, and she and St. Aubyn were left to entertain each other.

It seemed for a time as if he intended to maintain a profound silence; and Lyra, who felt—well, rather nervous in the presence of this strange animal—for it was the first professed "woman-hater" she had met—was longing for Dane's return, when Lord St. Aubyn said:

"Your husband and I are very old friends; but I dare say he has already told you that, Lady Armitage?"

"Yes," said Lyra.

Then she colored, for the dark-gray eyes fixed upon her seemed to add:

"And has told you everything else about me?"

He noticed the flush, and appeared to take it as an answer to his unspoken question.

"He is looking remarkably well and happy," he said. "Will you let me say that he deserves to be both, for he is the very best of good fellows."

Lyra flushed again, but with pride this time.

"I will let you sing Dane's praises as long as you please," she said, in her sweet, frank way.

The shadow of a smile crossed his face.

"No one could do it with better excuse," he said, "for I have no closer friend."

Then he leaned over the balcony-rail and appeared to completely forget her presence.

Dane shouted to them from one of the lower windows, and they found him in the street, and went for their stroll.

The two men talked together, almost to the exclusion of Lyra, who was quite content to listen, and declined to accept the attempts which one or the other of them now and again made to include her in the conversation.

Dane was delighted at meeting with his old friend, and she was delighted in his delight, and so was perfectly happy.

It was evident that Lord St. Aubyn was not only a great traveler, but that he did not do his "globe-trotting" with his eyes closed or his brain asleep, and Lyra was intensely interested in the short but graphic accounts of his wanderings. Rome he seemed to know as well as if he had been born there;

and once when Lyra stopped to look at an old church, and asked Dane its name, and he replied, with a laugh, "Goodness only knows! Where is your precious Baedeker?" Lord St. Aubyn volunteered the information, and supplemented it by a brief epitome of its history.

And gradually, as they strolled along, he grew more communicative to her, and pointed out and explained the various "lions" with which almost every street of the Eternal City is blessed.

But his eyes scarcely ever rested on her face, and his manner was marked with the reserve with which he had first greeted her. They lunched together in one of the restaurants, and when Lord St. Aubyn rose to take his leave, Dane attacked him with another invitation to dinner.

"It's all nonsense—that excuse of yours of a previous engagement, St. Aubyn. Don't be disagreeable, but dine with us to-night—there's a good fellow! If you really are engaged, chuck the other people over."

"I was not engaged, and I will dine with you," said St. Aubyn, quietly; and raising his hat, he walked off.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Dane, as he and Lyra sauntered home.

Lyra reflected a moment.

"I rather think I like him, though he is so anxious to show that he hates me and all my sex;" and she smiled.

Dane laughed, then sighed.

"Poor old chap! Just think what cause he has, and don't be hard on him, dear."

"I won't be hard on him," she said. "But I should like to remind him that all women are not wicked."

Lord St. Aubyn came to dinner. He looked very tall and still more distinguished in his evening-dress, and with Dane he was genial enough, but to Lyra his manner, though the perfection of courtesy, was marked by a cold reserve.

Most women would have resented it, but Lyra, though she was accustomed to the prompt homage and lavish admiration of her husband's male friends, bore it with a meekness and amiability which touched Dane to the core and filled him with gratitude.

After dinner Dane and Lord St. Aubyn adjourned to the balcony, and Lyra curled herself up in a corner, with a novel. She was so engrossed in it that she did not hear Lord St. Aubyn approach until he was standing in front of her.

"I have come to say good-night and to thank you," he



said—"to thank you not only for 'the pleasant evening,' but for your gracious self-sacrifice."

"What do you mean?" Lyra asked, with a smile.

He looked down at her innocently wide-opened eyes, with a subdued sadness in his smile.

"Do you think that I do not appreciate the fact that you have surrendered your husband to me for a whole evening, Lady Dane?"

"Oh, but Dane is so glad to see you, to have you with him," she said, naïvely.

He smiled outright.

"I am properly rebuked," he said, gravely. "I forgot, in my own pleasure at meeting him, that your sacrifice was entirely on his account—as it should be," he added.

"What are you two discussing?" said Dane, coming up to them. "Look here, Lyra, Lord St. Aubyn insists upon clearing out of Rome to-morrow, because he says he is afraid that he is *de trop*, and might spoil our honey-moon. I tell him that he won't do anything of the sort; but he is, and always was, as obstinate as a donkey. Just see what you can do with him. Tell him that when we find him in the way, we'll inform him of the fact. Or, look here, you might threaten that we'll go with him, wherever it is he's going. It's all one to us."

Lyra looked from one to the other with a smile, from Dane's handsome, happy, debonair face to Lord St. Aubyn's grave one.

"I will tell Lord St. Aubyn anything you please, Dane," she said.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, as if that settled the matter. "You can't go after that, my dear fellow."

"No," said Lord St. Aubyn, quietly.

He did not go, and after three or four days he ceased to talk of going, much to Dane's delight. For the first two or three days Lyra saw little of him, he and Dane going off for walks upon which she declined, quite pleasantly, to accompany them. On the fourth, St. Aubyn himself asked her.

"It is a question of your coming or my going. I did not remain that I might rob you of your husband's society, Lady Dane," for he, too, had dropped into the habit of calling her by Dane's Christian name.

"Very well," she said, and ran to put her hat on.

On the fifth day, St. Aubyn, after a long spell of silence—the two men were smoking their after-dinner cigars in the balcony—said:

"Dane, you ought to be a happy man!"

"I is," said Dane, laconically.

"Yes." St. Aubyn sighed. "She is a good woman, Dane."

Dane nodded.

"Just found it out, old man?"

"Yes," said St. Aubyn. "This morning I wandered into that old church by the second bridge. I thought I was all alone"—he paused—"then I saw your wife. She was kneeling with her face hidden in her hands."

Dane nodded.

"Yes; Lyra is fond of dropping into the quiet old churches," he said, his voice soft and tender. "Well?"

"Presently," went on St. Aubyn, in a low voice, "a woman came in with a child in her arms. It was a poor, dirty little wretch, and in pain, most likely, for it cried and wailed. The woman tried to quiet it, but I suppose the poor little thing wanted food, for it wouldn't be soothed. Your wife heard it." He paused. "She got up and went to the mother, and asked her to let her have the child, and nursed it—dirt and all. Money passed, no doubt, for from where I stood behind a pillar I heard the woman blessing her. But it wasn't the gift of the money. Any one could have played the Lady Bountiful. It was"—he smoked fiercely—"it was the look on your wife's face, as she pressed the little one to her bosom, that went home to me. It was the face of an angel—a pitiful, child-loving angel, Dane!"

There was silence for a moment, for Dane said nothing. That Lyra—*his* Lyra—was an angel was no news to him.

"It made me think," Lord St. Aubyn went on, in a low voice, "of that other woman—the woman who had taught me to hate her sex, and for one moment—God forgive me!—I envied you, Dane—yes, I envied you!"

Dane put out his hand and let it fall gently upon his friend's.

"Take care of her," said St. Aubyn, almost sternly. "She is worth cherishing." Then he took his hat and walked out.

From that day his manner toward Lyra changed. It was cold and repellent no longer, but eloquent of a tender, respectful, almost reverential devotion. But it was a devotion that was never obtrusive. When others were with her—and the English colony was particularly attentive to Lady Dane, and made much of her—he disappeared or kept in the background. But when he was alone with her and Dane he

seemed to slip more naturally and easily into the position of watch-dog and constant friend.

Dane, as has been remarked, was—well, of a somewhat indolent disposition. Your truly healthy, happy man is apt to be lazy. Why should he be otherwise? The world was made for him. So it happened that when Lyra wanted a book from the library, it was Lord St. Aubyn who fetched it for her, and selected it. It was he who, when she was going out, consulted the skies and found the sun-shade or umbrella. It was he who appeared on the balcony with a fleecy wrap on his arm, and the remark that the night air was chilly; but he always gave the wrap to Dane to put round her.

All the stores of his remarkable memory were placed at her service. If the three walked out together, it was he who was ready to answer her questions as to this statue or that ruin. He planned drives and moonlight excursions, and wherever they went he was always thoughtful of her comfort and convenience.

Dane noticed the change in him, and one day “chaffed” Lyra upon it.

“It is Una and the lion over again,” he said. “Really, you ought to be very proud, my dear. I’ve never seen him even decently civil to a woman since—since his great trouble. But I don’t suppose you are even grateful. You women think it only the proper thing for a man to chain himself to your chariot wheels.”

To his surprise, the eyes she lifted to him were tearful and almost reproachful.

“Don’t say that, Dane,” she said, in a low voice. “Do you think I haven’t noticed Lord St. Aubyn’s kindness? Oh, yes, yes! and I am grateful, indeed I am. It makes me so happy, ah, so happy, to think that my husband’s friend should be mine also!”

“Well, you needn’t cry, if you are happy,” he said, gently, penitently. “What a tender heart it is!” and he drew her face down and kissed her.

“I’m not crying,” she said, mendaciously, as she covertly wiped her eyes. “But I do pity him so much, Dane. Think what he must feel every time he sees us so happy. You *are* happy, Dane?”

“Slightly.”

“Think, when he sees us, how it must remind him of his own past happiness, lost forever! Dane, he must be a good man, or he would hate us; he could not bear to see us.”

“Well, he doesn’t hate you, at any rate,” said Dane.



"Poor old chap! he has looked something like his old self this last week or two. I tell you what: we'll take him back with us to Highfield, if I have to drag him there!"

St. Aubyn came in almost at the moment.

"I thought Lady Dane wanted to go to the Gallery this morning," he said, eying Dane's recumbent figure and slipper-shod feet.

"Did she? Did you? Oh, yes; I heard you two talking of it. All right; give me five minutes."

He was not longer than fifteen; but when they had started, he pulled up suddenly.

"I've left a letter I wanted to post," he said. "I'll catch you up in a minute or two."

"I'll go back for it," said Lyra, at once, and as a matter of course.

"No, no; I'll go," said St. Aubyn, equally as a matter of course.

Dane laughed.

"You should both, or either of you, go; but I've forgotten where I've left it," he said. "Walk on and I'll catch you."

They strolled on. It was a lovely morning, and the streets were crowded. They waited at the turning to the Gallery, and St. Aubyn seized the opportunity to open her sun-shade for her.

"Shall we go in?" he said. "Dane will go straight to the Gallery."

They went down the narrow street, and had almost reached the massive entrance when a small crowd came from the mouth of one of the alleys.

It was the usual street crowd, a policeman towering in the midst. St. Aubyn took Lyra's arm and drew her into a doorway to let them pass. As he did so, Lyra saw that the policeman had hold of a man. He was a disreputable-looking object, and apparently tipsy. His face was cut and bleeding, and his seedy clothes muddy.

"Oh! what has he done?" she said to St. Aubyn.

Before he could answer, the man, who had heard her voice, stopped and struggled in a feeble kind of way with his captor.

"There's—there's an Englishman—there, with that lady!" he said, hoarsely. "Let me speak to them; they'll answer for me. Let me speak to them, I tell you!"

The policeman took a firmer grip, and, with a shrug of the shoulders, was pushing him past, when Lyra, always swift to pity, said:

“Oh, let him stop! Lord St. Aubyn, let him speak to us. He is an Englishman, and—and in trouble!”

St. Aubyn frowned, not from hardness of heart, but from annoyance that she should be brought in contact with this disreputable business.

“Oh, see, he is so helpless!” she pleaded.

The man heard her, and made another struggle, only desirous of getting clear of the affair as soon as possible.

St. Aubyn stepped before her, as if to shut her from the crowd, and asked the policeman what was the matter.

Volubly he informed him that the man had been unable to pay his lodgings, and defrauded an honest landlady, and in resisting ejection had cut his head. He added that the man was “full of wine.”

“What does he say? What has the man done?” asked Lyra.

St. Aubyn told her in a few rapid sentences, and instantly her hand went for her purse.

In doing so, she inadvertently stepped slightly forward. The man saw her, stared for a moment, then uttered a strange cry, and, to the not unnatural amazement of the policeman, began to drag him away.

St. Aubyn put Lyra's purse aside.

“Go into the Gallery!” he said, in the quiet tone of command which few women can resist.

With a pitying glance at the prisoner—whose face was now turned away from her—she obeyed.

St. Aubyn inquired the amount of the debt, and placed some money in the man's hand. The man took it, with a strange look of bewilderment, tried to mutter some words of thanks, then, as the policeman released him, staggered back to the alley and disappeared.

St. Aubyn entered the Gallery and found Lyra.

“Is it all right?” she said. “Have they let him go?”

“Why do you distress yourself on account of a wretch who doesn't deserve a moment's thought of yours?” he said, almost rebukingly.

She smiled, her eyes still moist and pitying.

“He looked so miserable and unhappy, and”—she laughed softly, apologetically—“I, too, have been miserable and unhappy!”

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

LORD DANE and his charming viscountess, as the Roman papers were given to calling Lyra, came to London in May, and, as if it were a matter of course, St. Aubyn accompanied them. They did not intend to remain throughout the season, for neither Dane nor Lyra would have bartered the meadows of sweet, soft June for the garish gayeties of London ball-rooms; and it was arranged that, after a stay in town of some six or eight weeks, they should go down to Highfield. During their short London season the earl had offered them house-room at the huge family mansion at Lancaster Gate; and in anticipation of their acceptance, he had prepared a suite of rooms for Lyra, which, by the costliness of their luxury, absolutely appalled her.

Dane laughed as she sunk into an easy-chair covered with priceless Oriental brocade, and gazed round the exquisitely decorated and appointed apartments—bedroom, dressing-room, *boudoir*, all adjoining.

“Rather gorgeous and impressive, isn’t it?” he said.

“Oh, Dane!” she could only gasp, “how beautiful, how lovely! And how good he is to me! Think of him—and all he has to worry him—thinking of me, and taking so much trouble; for Dosie says that he chose the things and saw to it all himself.”

Dane smiled. He was pleased, of course.

“That’s the gov’nor all over,” he said; “he never does things by halves. It is his little way of showing you that he likes you.”

“*Little way!*” murmured Lyra, as she looked round the rooms, at the rare furniture, the rich hangings, the inlaid cabinets of unique curios, the hundred and one knickknacks of bric-a-brac which are so dear to the heart of every true woman, and looking at them, remembered the costly presents of gems which the old man had made her.

Dane laughed again.

“Goodness only knows what he has done with Highfield. Dosie hinted that he had transformed it into a miniature Star-minster. But I accept it all as my due—as a slight acknowledgment of my wisdom in choosing the dearest little girl in the world;” and he put his arm round her head and pressed it against his heart. “Now rouse yourself and get your war-



paint on, or you'll be late for dinner, and shock the always punctual Mrs. Fanshawe. You've been sitting there like a wax figure at Madame Tussaud's for the last ten minutes."

Five minutes afterward, he called out from the adjoining room, where he was vigorously brushing his hair:

"St. Aubyn dines with us to-night, I suppose?"

"Oh, I suppose so! Of course," she replied; and she laughed. "Didn't you ask him?"

"No," he said; "I left that to you. I took it that you would be certain to do so. Never mind. I'll look him up at the club and bring him home."

"Oh, do!" she said. "He would feel so solitary, dining alone the first night."

Dane smiled.

"I dare say he would find one or two other fellows at the club," he said. "But I'll tell him you asked him out of pity. He won't be offended, perhaps."

Lyra smiled.

"I can't imagine Lord St. Aubyn offended with me."

"In-deed!"

He laughed with intense enjoyment of her *naïveté*.

St. Aubyn was apparently not offended, and came home with Dane to what was just a little family party, including Dosie and Martin, Mrs. Leslie and the earl.

The meeting between the old man, who was the first to arrive, and Lyra was a very warm one.

"Well, my dear," he said, as he kissed her forehead, "so you have been very happy. I didn't ask, you see. I could read it in your face."

"Very, very happy!" she murmured, giving him a kiss. "I am glad you have come before the others, because I wanted to thank you for all you have done for me—my pretty rooms!"

He patted her shoulder, and smiled down at her with fatherly affection.

"Not a word of thanks, my dear. I wish you knew how pleasant an amusement it has been to me."

"Have you seen Dane yet?" she asked. "I—I think he has been happy."

He laughed softly.

"Yes; I met him sauntering along Pall Mall just now as if the world were the jolliest of all possible places and had been specially constructed for him. I didn't ask him, either, if he were happy. It was just as unnecessary as it was in your case. And so you are going down to Highfield in June?"

"Yes," she said. "We are both so fond of the country,

and—that is, we will stay in London, if you wish it,” she broke off gently, and looking up at him.

“Heaven forbid, my dear!” he said at once. “I wouldn’t have you risk those rose-tinted cheeks and bright eyes for the best season ever held. No—no; you are quite right. We miserable politicians are bound to sacrifice the summer, but there is no need for you and Dane to do it. And so you met St. Aubyn, and have brought him back with you. I am glad of that. He is a good fellow. Poor man! Dane has told you something of his great trouble, I suppose, my dear?”

“Yes,” she said, softly, pityingly.

The old man nodded.

“A good woman is beyond rubies,” he murmured, “a bad one is the devil’s counterfeit of an angel! After that epigram I’ll go and dress;” and he limped off. “I hear Dosie’s voice in the hall, and I should be *de trop*,” and he laughed.

The two women, after the first embrace, regarded each other critically, as is the manner of brides on meeting after the honey-moon.

“My dear Lyra, how well you look!” Lady Theodosia said.

“Why, that is what I was going to say to you!” exclaimed Lyra, as she drew her to a seat beside her.

Lady Theodosia smiled.

“I am very well,” she said. “But you look more than well. You are”—she hunted for a word—“radiant! I’m not surprised at the fuss they made of you abroad, and I think the papers are quite correct in prophesying a brilliant triumph for you here in London. I see it hasn’t spoiled you, Lyra, dear,” she added, as Lyra blushed. “Martin and I were sure you would not be changed, that all the admiration and flattery in the world could not make you vain.”

“Oh, I hope not!” laughed Lyra. “But I won’t say as much for your and Martin’s praises. And you are quite happy? But, as the earl says, I need not ask that.”

“Yes,” said Dosie, in her grave way, “we are quite happy; but indeed we haven’t time to be miserable, even if we were inclined. Since Martin took the living the work has been ever so much harder than it was before. You know that I have always felt that a parson’s wife should really be her husband’s helpmate, and I am trying to do my duty. We did think of letting Castle Towers and going to live in the old vicarage; but Martin would not consent. He was foolish enough to say that though he should prefer it, he would not let me deprive myself of the luxuries I have been accustomed to. As if I cared one jot whether I lived in a large house or

a small one, or had two servants or twenty, a pony-phaeton or a carriage and pair. No; I should *like* to lead the life of an ordinary clergyman's wife, but"—she sighed—"Martin will not hear of it."

"I always thought Mr. Fanshawe as wise as he is good," said Lyra.

Lady Theodosia's face lighted up.

"Oh, if you only knew how good he is, my dear!" she murmured. "But how selfish I am! Tell me about Dane."

"Oh, Dane is quite well, and as wicked as ever," said Lyra, laughing.

Dosie looked into her eye and nodded apprehendingly; then taking her hand and kissing her, she whispered:

"My dear, what a terrible mistake you and I nearly made! Think if I had gone on and—and robbed you of him!"

Lyra flushed and pressed her hand.

"Yes, and robbed Martin of yourself!" she whispered back.

It was a very pleasant, happy little reunion, and Lord St. Aubyn was not allowed to consider himself in the way. He and the old earl had a good deal to say to each other, and St. Aubyn spoke scarcely half a dozen times to Lyra; but every now and then his eyes rested on her with the grave regard which, often as she met it, never caused her any embarrassment; and once, when telling Dosie of some incident that had occurred during their travels, she forgot the name of the place, and turned to ask Dane, who, engaged with Mrs. Leslie, did not hear her, St. Aubyn quickly supplied the required information, as if he had been listening; and when on leaving the room she said, "Oh! I have forgotten my fan," he held it out to her, just as her maid might have done.

Lady Theodosia remarked on the change in him.

"You and Dane have quite reformed Lord St. Aubyn," she said, with a smile. "He has become positively attentive and polite. He used to be—"

"A perfect bear!" put in Mrs. Leslie, laughing. "The last time we met him he stalked away from us as if we were plague-stricken."

Lyra looked from one to the other.

"Is he so changed? He has always been so kind and thoughtful since I have known him," she said.

Mrs. Leslie laughed again.

"So you take the credit of his reformation, my dear," she said.

"I?" exclaimed Lyra, opening her eyes. "Why, what



have I to do with it? He is Dane's friend. If he is changed, it must be through Dane."

"Yes," said Mrs. Leslie, with her old, pleasant irony; "the force of example. We all know what a Chesterfield of attention and courtesy Lord Dane is."

There was a general laugh at this sally, and then the three women began to talk of the coming season.

"You have a terrible business before you, my dear," said Mrs. Leslie. "You will be overwhelmed with invitations, and will have to work like a slave—the slave of fashion—while you are here. No more free-and-easy wanderings about continental towns, no more *tête-à-tête* dinners at restaurants with Lord Dane.

Lyra laughed.

"Oh, it was nearly always a trio!" she said, naïvely. "Lord St. Aubyn generally dined with us"—then she sighed—"and we were so happy! I am—I am almost sorry we came to London at all, if it is to be altogether different. Dosie, you will have to stay and help me. I know nothing about society ways—absolutely nothing—and I shall make the most dreadful mistakes."

Lady Theodosia looked horrified at the proposal.

"My dear Lyra," she said, gravely, "I should be very pleased to stay with you, but"—her voice grew almost solemn—"it is impossible for me to leave my parish—quite impossible."

Mrs. Leslie smiled.

"Quite impossible!" she echoed, with a capital imitation of Lady Theodosia's solemnity. "Don't you know, Lady Dane, that if she left the parish the church roof would fall in, the old women would die, the school children play truant, and, in fact, the whole place rush headlong to ruin? But I don't think you need be afraid of making mistakes. Even if you made them, the world would deem them delightful, and pronounce them the fashion. My dear, famous persons are incapable of mistakes; their faults become virtues, their crimes little blemishes which prove human and not quite divine. Would you like me to stay with you? I will, if you like."

Lyra jumped at the proposal.

"Why, will you, really?" she exclaimed, delightedly.

"Yes, if Dosie will spare me, and I'm sure she will," said Mrs. Leslie.

"Why, of course," said Lady Theodosia. "But the idea

that Lyra should make 'mistakes,' as she calls it, is ridiculous."

So it was arranged that Mrs. Leslie should remain at Lancaster Gate, and Lyra commenced "the campaign," as Dane called it, with that experienced woman of the world at her side.

From the very commencement the campaign proved a triumph. For once the heralds of fame had not exaggerated, and at Lyra's first ball, the Duchess of Torchester's, the first notes of victory were sounded with no uncertain tones. That great lady, the duchess herself, expressed an emphatic approval of Lord Dane's wife.

"She is as lovely as they said, and twice as sweet," she declared; and during the evening she took an opportunity of congratulating Dane.

"You are a most fortunate man, Lord Dane," she said. "Your wife is the dearest little woman"—Lyra was every inch as tall as her grace, by the way—"and perfectly irresistible. I see she has already got all the best men round her, but I don't think she will be spoiled."

"Thank you, duchess," said Dane, in his outright fashion. "No, I don't think she will be spoiled. I've given her a good trial canter."

Her grace laughed.

"Oh, any one can see that you are absurdly fond of her," she retorted. "And they tell me—" She stopped and laughed again.

"Don't mind my feelings, duchess. Pray, go on."

"Well, they say that it is six of one and half a dozen of the other."

"Yes," said Dane, with mock gravity—"yes, I think she is fond of me. But you mustn't be hard upon her. It is the only instance of bad taste of which she has been guilty."

The duchess smiled. She and Dane were old friends, and she enjoyed his mock cynicism.

"She is too good for you, Dane," she said.

"So one or two other persons have remarked to me," he said, placidly; "but I shall think it's true, impossible as it sounds, if you say so."

The duchess's ball was followed by a whole string of others, and Lyra was plunged into the whirlpool of London fashionable life. Concerts, dinners, receptions, all the diversions which go to make up Vanity Fair in full swing seemed to absorb all her time.

"Why, it is hard work," she remarked, smilingly, to Mrs. Leslie—"very hard work!"

"Yes," assented that lady, "and not particularly good pay. My dear, some of these days the upper classes will strike for an eight-hours' day and won't be happy till they get it."

Dane, after a time, did not always accompany the ladies, but he generally "dropped in" at the small hours, and perhaps remained to bring them home. Lord St. Aubyn, however, was present at nearly every fashionable function. He never danced, but it always happened that when Lyra discovered she was tired and wanted to rest, she also found that Lord St. Aubyn was near her, and ready to take her to some comparatively quiet and cool spot, and it was he who generally had her fan, her bouquet, her wrap, when they were missing.

His face had lost something of its sadness, though the expression of weariness was still observable in his eyes, and he was still very silent and reserved. Even with Lyra herself he was not talkative, and it was not unusual for them to sit out a dance in perfect silence. But if she spoke, his dreamy, abstracted manner vanished in a moment, and he was all attention to her lightest word, and on the alert to gratify her smallest wish.

For a time there was a little whisper, not of scandal, but of gossip and curiosity, but the most inveterate slanderer could find nothing in Lyra's manner or conduct to excuse calumny. Her obvious affection for her husband would have rendered any aspersions ridiculous.

To all her admirers—and their name was legion—her manner was the same. She was kindness, sweetness itself; was grateful for their attention, patient with their flattery—and that was all.

Poor young Clarence Hoare declared, with something suspiciously like tears in his eyes, that if she would only be angry with him, he could bear it better than her unvarying kindness, her smiling unbelief of his devotion.

"She is such an angel of modesty, so—so humble, don't you know—dash it! no, that's not the word, but I can't get the right one—that she can't see that she's the loveliest and best woman in the world; and she only smiles when—when you try and tell her so."

Lord St. Aubyn paid no compliments. He had never once hinted at her beauty, or praised a dress or an ornament. All the world might have heard every word he had ever said to her; and yet Lyra could always tell when he liked a new



dress, and unconsciously she got into the habit of consulting his eyes when she was doubtful of some new costume or arrangement of jewelry. She had long ago discovered the futility of asking Dane's opinion on such matters. In his eyes she was just perfect in whatever she wore, and there was an end of it.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

DANE had sent down to Starminster for a couple of hacks for her, and Lyra now rode in the park each morning. She had learned very quickly, nominally under the tutorship of a riding-master, but really under Dane and St. Aubyn's teaching. Dane generally accompanied her in the morning gallop, but not seldom St. Aubyn rode on the other side; and it was more often than not he, instead of Dane, who examined her horse's girths and bit, and put her into the saddle.

One day St. Aubyn bought a pair of ponies and phaeton—outbidding a Russian princess, by the way; but he did not present them to Lyra, and took Dane's check. Who was he that he should presume to offer her a gift? But Lyra was as grateful as if they had indeed been a present.

"That you should think of me!" she said. "Is it true that the princess cried with disappointment?"

"I dare say," he said, in his grave way.

"Oh, Lord St. Aubyn wouldn't care if all the other women in the world were dissolved in tears if he could make you smile, Lady Armitage; neither would I," blurted out young Clarence, who happened to be present.

Lyra looked rather startled, and glanced from the boy's flushed face to the grave one of St. Aubyn; but St. Aubyn did not flinch.

"Mr. Hoare thinks that he has a pretty talent for epigram, Lady Dane," he said. "He is not the first man who has made a similar mistake."

The boy saw in a moment that he had said something more than usually foolish, and colored; but he was scarcely prepared for the severe reprimand which he received when Lyra had left him and St. Aubyn alone.

"No one, I suppose, can prevent you talking silly nonsense to Lady Dane, Clarence," St. Aubyn said, with a sternness of tone and eye that made the boy wince, "but let me ask you not to include me in your folly. There, my boy," he added, rather more kindly, as he laid his hand on the lad's shoulder, "don't look so heart-broken. It was only a silly speech, and

silly speeches of that nature appear to be the vogue. But don't you think, Clarence, that you take a mean advantage of Lady Dane?"

"Mean advantage! I?" exclaimed the lad, half indignant, half remorseful.

"Yes," said St. Aubyn. "Most of the women you talk to in that fashion either laugh at or snub you. But Lady Dane never laughs; at most, she only smiles, and she is always patient and forbearing. Respect her forbearance and patience."

"If—if I thought I'd ever said anything to offend—give pain to Lady Dane, I'd—I'd cut my tongue out!" stammered the lad.

St. Aubyn smiled down at him, not contemptuously, but with a kindly pity.

"My dear Clarence, I think Lady Dane scarcely hears you; I am sure that she does not remember one of your pretty speeches two minutes after it is delivered. Keep your tongue—you'd miss it too much." Then, as the lad turned away, St. Aubyn's hand fell on his shoulder again and gripped it tightly. "There, there!" he said, still more kindly. "You think me a brute, I dare say. Well, so I am; but I am not such a fool as to fail to see that Lady Dane is too good for the nonsense you offer her. My boy, you and I should approach such a woman on our knees, and not with empty flattery on our lips;" and he strode off, leaving Clarence with something of the sensation which a man feels when he has been severely though kindly whipped.

The days sped by, the spring was dawning into summer, and the time came when, by all the rules of etiquette, Lady Dane should give her principal ball. There had, of course, been many dinners and "At Homes," but this was a special affair. For this tremendous function even Dosie had consented to tear herself from her beloved parish and its manifold duties.

Lyra had by this time become one of those important personages, "a leader of fashion," and this dance naturally created a flutter of excitement. Large as was the ball-room in the house at Lancaster Gate, it could not accommodate half the persons who were anxious to be present, and the usual scrimmage for cards took place—the usual exultation in the hearts of the successful, and more than the usual heart-burnings of those that failed.

A royal personage had not only promised but "requested permission" to be present, and as Dane, who took the whole thing in his usual indolent fashion, remarked, the affair threatened to be the "biggest show" of the season.

For this ball, Lyra, who was given to dressing very quietly, was persuaded to depart from her usual rule, and a magnificent costume had been ordered from Worth. She was to wear—for the first time since her presentation—the famous Starminster diamonds, and in the society papers—some say before the ball—appeared paragraphs descriptive of this dress and the famous gems, much to Dane's amusement and Lyra's annoyance.

"I have a very great mind not to wear them," she said to Mrs. Leslie, who laughingly remarked that Lyra was too economically minded to waste a dress that had cost a small fortune.

The night, in the first week in June, was a superb one, and a large concourse of sightseers had collected as near the entrance of the house as possible, eager to see the guests as they alighted from their carriages and passed under the scarlet awning to the ball-room.

Lyra, as she stood at the door, receiving the brilliant and seemingly endless line, might be excused if now and again she asked herself the question:

"Is this I—I, Lyra Chester of the Mill Cottage by the Taw, or is it some great lady masquerading in my name and likeness?"

But whenever the strangeness of the change struck upon her senses, she had only to turn to Dane, who stood, a few feet from her, with her bouquet in his hand, and his cheery smile on his happy face, to realize that she was the same person, though Lyra Chester no longer, but Lyra, Viscountess Armitage.

At a little distance St. Aubyn hovered about, in case Lyra should "want" him, and when, now and again, she would beckon him with a smile or a wave of the hand, he would stride forward like a soldier at the command of his officer, execute her order, and be back again in silent, almost grim attendance.

"Getting tired about the wrist?" asked Dane, in a break of the long line of arrivals. "What a pity they don't have a dummy hostess, a sort of effigy, with clock-work arms and a mechanical voice, which, whenever its hand was shook, would squeak out: 'Oh! how do you do? So good of you to come!'"

Lyra shook her head. She was strong and not at all tired, but St. Aubyn came forward with a chair.

"You can sit down for a few moments, at any rate," he said. "What a mass of people there are! You don't expect them to dance, poor wretches, do you?"



Lyra smiled.

"Everybody seems to have come who was asked," she said.

"And a great many who were not," remarked Mrs. Leslie, laughing. "I only hope that the 'prince' will be able to make his way through the rooms."

"How hot it is getting!" said Dane. "I'll just go and see if we can take off the roof, or knock out one of the walls. Just look after her, St. Aubyn, will you?"

St. Aubyn took the bouquet as a matter of course, and his place just behind Lyra. The rooms were hot, as Dane had said, and the music seemed to throb through the heat waves and the voices like the pulsations of a steam engine.

"Will you not be glad to get into the country?" St. Aubyn said, in his low voice. "Think of the green fields with to-night's moon on them, and the thrushes singing in the trees!"

Lyra sighed and laughed.

"Don't, please!" she said, wistfully. "Oh, how do you do, Lady Sutcliffe? How good of you to come!" etc., etc.

Presently there rose the sound of a cheer from the small crowd outside, followed by the usual stir and flutter of excitement on the stairs, the stir that communicates itself to the ball-rooms themselves, and Lyra knew that the prince had arrived, to set by his presence the seal of absolute success on her ball.

Gracious, genial, not "affable," but genuinely amiable and desirous to please, he made a longer stay than usual; and with perfect sincerity, and the smile and bow for which he is famous, congratulated Lyra upon the success of her party. Then when he had taken his departure, and the hour had become too advanced for many fresh arrivals, she was free to leave her post and move about the rooms.

"Yes," said the Duchess of Torchester, watching her as with a step light and graceful as that with which she had gone up the valley, trout-rod in hand, Lyra moved among her guests—"yes, I don't know that I remember a lovelier and more fascinating woman. She is as full of dignity as an empress, and yet as simple-minded and modest as a girl—more, indeed, than some," she added. "See how she wears that dress and the Starminster diamonds. They might be glass beads for any sign of consciousness she shows. And she is unconscious. There is not a woman here who could wear them with a better air than she does. No wonder Lord Dane looks proud and happy. See! he has just gone to speak to

her. Notice the way he looks at her, the smile in his eyes, and hers."

Her grace turned away and sighed.

"Why can't one always keep young?" she murmured.

There was a crush in the supper-rooms, and Lyra hoped that after supper some of the guests would go; but no one was anxious to leave what was evidently to prove *the* ball of the season, and the crowd was as great after the festive meal as before.

Lyra, of course, did not dance—every inch of room was needed for her guests—and she and St. Aubyn were sitting at the entrance to the fernery, not talking, but looking on, just when the ball was at its height; and Lyra was gazing at the faces as they passed, with rather an absent air, when suddenly she became conscious of one of those shocks which are caused by the sight of a person closely connected with a painful incident in one's past life.

The man—or was it a woman?—she could not tell—had passed in a moment and been swallowed up in the crowd of dancers and promenaders; but in that moment back rushed upon Lyra's mind the memory of that awful day when she stood face to face with Geoffrey Barle—her husband—and demanded the price of her sacrifice.

It came back with a rush that sent the blood to her face. Why, she had almost forgotten the existence of the man, had almost learned, in her great happiness, to doubt the reality of that awful past, and now—

"It is dreadfully hot," said St. Aubyn's voice in her ear.

"Will you come out on the balcony, quite into the air?"

"No, no," she said. "I may be wanted. Here is Dane coming even now. What is it, Dane?"

He came up, wiping his forehead, and looking, as she thought, rather annoyed.

"Has he been here?" he asked.

"He! Who?"

"He insisted upon my bringing him to you. Confound him!" he went on. "I gave him the slip, but I shouldn't be surprised if he turns up by himself. Eh? Oh, I beg pardon! Of course, this is my dance;" and away he whirled.

"What was it Dane meant?" she asked St. Aubyn.

"I don't know. I'll go and find him;" and he rose.

"No, no," she said. "Stay, please."

He sat down again.

"I wish you would come into the air," he said. "I am sure you are tired, Lady Dane."

She shook her head.

"Not in the least. I'd dance with Dane, if I might; but I suppose I dare not."

"I suppose not," he said, with a smile. "I wish I could beg for one, but I am only fit to dance by myself, and at the end of a chain, like other bears. Oh, here is Dane, and he has some one with him!"

Dane came up. A man walked beside him, but Lyra scarcely glanced at the latter, until Dane said, with a certain grim reluctance:

"Lyra, let me introduce my cousin Chandos to you. He has only just come back from— Where is it you've been skulk—staying?"

He turned as he put the question, or he must have seen and remarked his wife's face. With a smile she had risen to greet Dane's relation; her eyes rested with natural interest on his face for a moment, then she seemed turned to stone. She did not fall, did not scream, but stood with every muscle rigid, as Lot's wife might have stood one moment before her transformation into senseless salt. The blood slowly ebbed from her face, the light faded from her eyes.

"I have fainted," she thought; "yes, that is it. I ought to have gone with Lord St. Aubyn into the fresh air. He is always wise. I have fainted, and I am dreaming, deliriously dreaming, that this man, Dane's cousin, is—Geoffrey Barle."

Then slowly, slowly the color came back to her face, the light to her eyes. She looked at him, looked him full in the face, then round the room, and knew—God help her!—that she was awake and conscious, that this man standing with bowed head before her *was* none other than Geoffrey Barle, her husband. Her *husband*!

She stretched out her hand mechanically. Her fan was in it, and the fan dropped.

St. Aubyn stooped and picked it up, and unobtrusively fanned her.

"Your cousin Chandos?" she felt herself saying.

"Yes," said Dane, grimly; "just back, like the Prodigal."

"Spare me, my dear Dane," she heard the voice say—the soft, sleek voice she remembered so well and hated so unspeakably; "spare me! Why is it that every man who returns from a holiday that is a little longer than usual is so promptly dubbed by that very trite and hackneyed title, 'the Prodigal'? But Prodigal or not, I am very glad to see you, Lady Armi—"

Then he stopped, and she felt rather than saw that he recognized her.



He went white to the lips, a greenish, unwholesome white, and his jaw dropped for a moment; then the color flooded his face, and his pale eyes grew red and hot, as if the blood had rushed to his head, and he stood looking at her.

"Here, come on and I'll find you a partner," said Dane.

"No, thanks," said Chandos. "It would be cruel to ask me in such a crowd. Perhaps Lady Dane will permit me to introduce myself more fully. We are—er—"—he smiled—"relations, and should know each other."

"All right," said Dane, and he went off.

St. Aubyn handed Lyra her fan.

"I still advise you to go outside," he said, in a low voice.

She looked at him as if she did not hear him, or did not understand.

He moved away, but not out of sight. He had seen the change that had come over her. It was his duty to watch over her.

Chandos drew near and seated himself beside her. Instinctively she rose, but, with a long breath and a shudder, sunk down again.

"Lyra!" He bent his head toward her, like a loathsome snake, as it seemed to her. "Lyra!"

She did not turn her head.

He whispered her name once more:

"Lyra, you know me?"

Half unconsciously her lips opened, and she formed his name:

"Geoffrey Barle!"

He smiled and passed his hand across his thin lips—a trick she remembered and loathed.

"Yes, I am Geoffrey Barle, your husband," he whispered behind his hand; then he laughed.

She rose and looked round wildly. St. Aubyn was by her side in a moment, as it seemed.

"Take—take me—into—the air!" she gasped.

"Permit me," he said to Chandos; and, drawing Lyra's arm within his so far that he literally supported her, he led her away.

Mr. Chandos looked after them, and then up at the ceiling, and then at Dane, whose head towered above a group at the other end of the room, and softly, reflectively gnawed his lips.

"Dane's wife!" he muttered. "Dane's wife!"

## CHAPTER XXXV.

GEOFFREY BARLE—her husband!

Lyra leaned against the balcony and looked at the sky, in which the stars were beginning to pale before the approaching dawn, and tried to realize, to cope with this awful fact, this terrible calamity.

For a time it seemed to her that she must be the victim of some hideous nightmare or hallucination. It could not—could not be true, that Geoffrey Barle had come to life again. Why, if it was true, then—then she, Lyra, was not Dane's wife! she who loved him so, loved him far better than her own life, who would be the mother of his child—not his wife! She put her hands to the sides of her head and rocked to and fro in her agony.

St. Aubyn picked up the shawl of Indian silk which her gesture had displaced, and put it over her shoulders.

"You are tired out, Lady Dane," he said. "Shall I get you a glass of wine? I wish to Heaven those people would go." And he glanced angrily toward the ball-room.

"No, no," she said; then she changed her mind. "Yes, get me some wine."

He went and brought her a glass of champagne and almost held it to her lips, for her hands were shaking as if with ague; and as he ministered to her with all a man's gentleness and a woman's patience, he asked himself what had happened to her. She had seemed to break down during her introduction to Chandos. Surely the man's presence had not upset her; why should it do so?

"I think you should be in bed, Lady Dane," he said. "Why not go. I will fetch Dane—"

"No, no," she said, quickly. "Give me a little time to think, to breathe—do not fetch him yet." And her voice grew almost pleading.

St. Aubyn was puzzled as well as anxious. Her exhaustion appeared to be as much mental as physical.

"You have been doing too much," he said. "You were not used to this confounded life, this endless round of toil, which some of us call pleasure—this turning of night into day and day into night. You are too good to be sacrificed to such a life."

There was an angry, impatient ring in his low voice which roused her.

"Yes, that is it; it is the late hours," she said. "And I am not used to it. It was all new to me." She made no effort to compose herself, to rally from the awful shock which the sight of Geoffrey Barle had inflicted, and partially succeeded. "Take me back now," she said. "How good and patient you are always with me, Lord St. Aubyn," she added. "Oh, what it is to have a friend!" And she turned her tearless, burning eyes upon him for a moment with sad gratitude.

"I don't know anything about my goodness and patience, Lady Dane," he said; "but you are quite right when you say I am your friend. That goes without saying; and as a friend, I wish you were out of this and in the quietude of your own room. I can see that you are ill."

"Ill! Do you think so? Do I look ill?" she asked.

"I am compelled to answer—yes," he said, gravely. "You want rest, immediate rest, and you must have it. I am glad to say that the people are clearing out."

They were going rapidly. He stood beside her, ready to catch her if she should fall, and indeed it seemed to him not unlikely that she would, as she speeded the parting guests; and presently, very quickly, though it appeared to be hours to him, the great crowd had melted away. Dane came bounding up the stairs—he had been saying good-night in the hall—came up with a smile on his lips to congratulate his darling on the great success of the evening, but at sight of her white, haggard face stopped short, aghast.

"Lyra!"

She tried to smile.

"I am all right, Dane," she said. "I am only tired, that is all, is it not, Lord St. Aubyn?" and she turned to him with a feverish eagerness.

Lord Aubyn nodded, his grave eyes resting anxiously on the lovely but drawn and weary face.

"I am afraid Lady Dane is knocked up," he said. "Will you let me send in the doctor, Dane?"

"No, no!" exclaimed Lyra; but Dane answered in the affirmative with a glance; and St. Aubyn passed down the stairs.

Dane took her in his arms.

"My dear girl, what is it?" he murmured, with loving solicitude. "You are worn out. What a blind, selfish idiot I am not to have thought of it, not to have taken better care of you."

She resigned herself to his embrace, and lay in his arms for a moment or two, like a weary child, her head resting against



his heart, her white arms round his neck; then suddenly the thought smote her, "Geoffrey Barle, my husband, is alive," and with a convulsive shudder she tore herself from his arms and shrunk away from him.

Greatly alarmed, he tried to take her to him again, but she shrunk still further back.

"No—no!" she panted. "Don't—don't touch me—don't come near me!"

He went white.

"Lyra!"

"My dear, what is the matter?" exclaimed Mrs. Leslie, coming up to them.

Lyra turned to her and grasped her arm.

"Take me away—at once!" she panted, huskily. "I—I am ill. It—it may be some fever. Don't—don't let him come near me!"

Mrs. Leslie put her arm round her, and signed to Dane not to approach.

"Come with me, my dear. Yes, you look ill."

Lyra paused after a few steps and looked back at Dane, standing like stone where she had thrust him.

"Don't—don't mind me, Dane," she said, with a piteous attempt at a smile. "I—I am not well. I scarcely know what I am saying."

"My darling!" and he took a half step toward her.

"No, no!" she breathed, with a shudder; "you must not come near me. But, Dane"—she put her hand to her throat—"Dane, you—you know I—I love you."

"Lyra!"

She panted as if for breath.

"And—and you love me, Dane? You will—will not hate me, whatever—whatever happens?"

He would have taken her in his arms again, but Mrs. Leslie shook her head warningly.

"Do not excite her," she said, gravely. "Let her go alone with me. And get the doctor," she added, in a whisper.

Dane met St. Aubyn and the famous physician, Sir Andrew Starke, a few yards from the house, and Dane and St. Aubyn paced the empty ball-room, waiting for his report.

"I can not understand it," poor Dane said over and over again. "She was all right when I left her, about an hour before the ball broke up. I thought she looked rather pale and tired when I introduced Chandos to her, but—but I did not think she was so dreadfully ill. Why—why, she talked quite

wildly, you know;" and he looked piteously at St. Aubyn, who walked beside him grave and silent.

Sir Andrew came back to them at last.

"There is no cause for alarm, Lord Armitage," he said, answering Dane's look. "Her ladyship is overtired. Nervous exhaustion has produced some fever. She will need rest, complete rest and quiet." He looked down at the polished floor which had so recently been pressed by hundreds of dancing feet, and thought for a moment. "There has been no mental shock, no unusual excitement of late, I suppose?"

Dane stared at him with surprise.

"Shock?" he repeated. "No, certainly not. What could there be?"

"Just so," assented the courtly physician. "I asked because Lady Armitage's condition answered to that produced by some sudden mental disturbance. There has been none, you say?"

Dane shook his head emphatically.

"No, none whatever. You have been near Lyra all the evening, St. Aubyn. You know of nothing to upset her, do you?"

St. Aubyn shook his head.

"Nothing," he said, gravely. "Lady Dane appeared quite well—a little tired, perhaps—until just before the close of the ball."

"Just so," said Sir Andrew. "It is possible she may have taken a chill, but I think that the feverish condition is attributable to nervous prostration. She must be kept quiet. I should leave her to her maid, and, yes, one other person—Mrs. Leslie, say—for the next few days."

"Do you mean that I am not to see her?" demanded Dane, aghast.

Sir Andrew inclined his head.

"I am afraid I must lay an embargo on you of all others," he said. "There must be no risk of excitement, and your presence would be dangerous. She, herself, seems anxious that you should not see her. It is, of course, a symptom of her peculiar condition. The nerves—the nerves, my dear Lord Armitage, are our great trouble nowadays. As soon as she is well enough to be moved, we must take her into the country. I think I will come in again in the morning—that is, a little later on—for it is morning now. Pray, do not be alarmed," he added, in his well-known, kindly fashion. "There is no cause for apprehension. Rest, quiet, and

change, and above all, the absence of all excitement, will restore her ladyship."

Dane sunk on to a settee and looked up at St. Aubyn.

"Is he speaking the truth or—or only deceiving me?" he said, fearfully. "I love her so that—that—that—"

St. Aubyn laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Don't give way," he said, in his grave voice. "That's not like you, Dane."

Dane sighed, and tried to smile.

"Why, man, you are as white as a ghost yourself," he said.

St. Aubyn colored and winced.

"She must go away," Dane went on, "as soon as she can be moved," he said. "I will take her to Highfield directly the very first moment it is possible. I say, old fellow, I wish you'd go down and see that it is all ready, will you? I can't leave her, though I mustn't see her."

"Certainly," responded St. Aubyn, and as a matter of course.

Chandos had sat where Lyra had left him for a quarter of an hour; then he had left the house and gone home.

The first thing he did on reaching his chambers was to mix himself a stiff glass of brandy and water, and it was not until he had consumed this, and "one to follow," that he could pull himself together and realize the situation.

It was so astounding, so melodramatic a one, that it had overwhelmed and confused him. It seemed incredible, during the months he had been skulking about the least-frequented parts of the Continent, sometimes in Spain, sometimes in Mexico, then, as he grew bolder, in Switzerland and France, he had scarcely thought of Lyra. The whole incident had ended so disastrously for him, that, as is the fashion with weak-minded men, he had tried to forget it. He had had anything but a pleasant time of it; had missed those little luxuries which are necessities to men of his temperament; had missed his club, his saunter down Pall Mall, his little circle of admiring acquaintances; in short, had been as uncomfortable as a fish out of water. He longed and pined for home, as many an exile before him had done, and the day he chanced upon an old London paper and read in the "provincial" column of the finding of the dead body in the Taw and its supposed identification, he started for London. On his way thither he read, in *Galignani*, of the great social success of the Viscountess Armitage, and so was informed of Dane's marriage.

With a curse, he flung the paper from him.

"No chance of my coming into the title now," he muttered;



"there's sure to be a whole pack of children!" and he arrived in London in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, glad as he was to find himself there.

The first thing he heard of was Lady Armitage's great ball, and it seemed to him that it would be a good opportunity for his re-entry into London society. Besides, he was rather curious to see Dane's wife, though it didn't matter to him in the slightest whom Dane had married. Whoever she was, she would, no doubt, effectually cut him—Chandos—out of all chance of the Starminster peerage.

And Dane had married Lyra Chester! Over his brandy and water he managed at last to realize the fact. Then he began to ask himself a series of questions, and first of all came this one: Did she believe him—Chandos—to be dead? Yes; there could be no doubt of that. Her face, the look of horror and amazed incredulity in her lovely eyes as they rested on him, evidenced that. She had looked as if she had seen a ghost.

Mr. Chandos chuckled.

"Oh, yes," he muttered, "she thought she had got rid of me, that's certain! And now, has she told Dane? No," he muttered. "Dane would not have received me even as amiably as he did. He would have chucked me out, instead of introducing me to his wife. She hasn't told him, and she believes in that—that marriage. She thinks I am her husband. And now the question is, what will she do? Will she tell Dane?"

He pondered over this for hours, while the gray dawn changed to rosy sunrise, and shone through the chink of his blind upon his flushed face, and came to the conclusion that whether she confessed to Dane or not depended very much upon him, Chandos.

"I must be careful," he muttered—"very careful. I don't quite see my way yet; but it seems to me that I have a decent hand, and that if I can play it properly I may win the game. Here's Dane's wife under the impression that I am her husband turned up again, and afraid to say a word. If I could only bring about a separation, there's only Dane between me and the title. By Jove! if I could only see my way!" He mixed himself another glass and lighted a fresh cigarette. Sneaking about the by-ways of the Continent had not improved Mr. Chandos's habits, and he drank and smoked a great deal more than he had been wont to do. "If I could only see my way! At any rate, the first thing I must do is to persuade her to keep her own counsel. I wonder, now, whether I could frighten her into leaving Dane?"

He turned this suggestion over in his mind, and tried to beat it into definite shape.

"If I could manage it, it wouldn't be a bad move. Dane isn't the man to marry again; he's very fond of her; I saw that this evening. Ah!" he drew a long breath, "there's a chance for me if I could only see what cards to play. Well, I'll wait and watch." And with a chuckle he staggered to bed.

The next week was an anxious, an indescribably anxious one for all who loved Lyra. During the seven days she lay apparently in utter prostration, and almost unconscious of everything around her. Sir Andrew, who was in constant attendance, was very grave, but by no means despairing; and Mrs. Leslie and Theodosia, who scarcely left her, assured Dane, almost beside himself with fear, that there was no danger, and that she would live. And on the eighth day there came a change for the better.

But though she was now fully conscious, and his name was the first to leave her lips, Lyra expressed no desire to see Dane; and when he was permitted to enter the room, his presence seemed to disturb and excite her so much that Sir Andrew ordered him out again.

"I—I can't understand it," poor Dane remarked to St. Aubyn, who was, as he had hitherto been, his constant companion. "That my darling should be upset by the sight of me! Why, she—it seemed to me that she absolutely shrunk from me!"

"When people are in her state, their minds run by the rule of contrary," said St. Aubyn. "She will be all right when she gets away from London and down at Highfield."

"I hope so," said Dane, gloomily, "or I shall go out of my mind."

Lyra's recovery was more rapid than they had ventured to hope, and after a fortnight Sir Andrew pronounced her well enough to take the journey; but he enjoined perfect quiet, and warned them against permitting the patient to become excited.

Dane—or, rather, St. Aubyn—for Dane was scarcely capable of anything but pacing up and down next his darling's room and waiting for news of her—made the most careful arrangements for the journey, and, at Dane's earnest solicitation, accompanied them.

"You'd better come," Dane said. "She has been so used to you that she might miss you, and"—he paused and gnawed at his mustache—"and, somehow, though she seems to avoid

seeing me or having anything to do with me, she doesn't mind you. She has asked after you several times."

"It is symptomatic of hysteria to shun those we really care most about," said St. Aubyn. "I will go down with you, in case I should be of any use. Anyhow, I shall be company for you."

"Yes; I don't know what I should do without you," said Dane.

They reached Highfield, the two men traveling in a smoking-compartment. At almost every station Dane had gone to the Pullman car in which the ladies were and asked after Lyra, and once or twice she stretched out her hand to him and smiled at him—a strange smile, full of wistful tenderness—but she did not speak.

Highfield was an extremely beautiful place, and Dane had looked forward to showing it to her, and promised himself much enjoyment in her delight and admiration, but she viewed it with sad, melancholy indifference.

The whole place had been redecorated and refurnished, and the earl had indeed made a palace of it; but instead of the hearty and noisy welcome with which the tenants and servants had intended receiving their master and mistress, a subdued air of unnatural quietude brooded over the house.

The weather was lovely, the gardens all aglow with flowers, and for days Dane and St. Aubyn wandered about anxious and *distract*, for though Lyra was "getting better," she was still confined to her room, and saw no one but Mrs. Leslie. Lady Theodosia, at Lyra's insistence, had gone back to Martin and "her parish" again. But one morning Mrs. Leslie came to Dane with better news.

"I think she might go out to-day," she said.

Dane brightened up at once.

"I'll get the carriage," he said. "No; I'll drive her in the pony-carriage. It runs very easily, and we can go softly. It will seem like old times," he added, with a little shake in his voice that touched Mrs. Leslie.

"You will be patient with her, Lord Dane?" she said.

"Patient?" He stared at her. "Why, of course I will. How do you mean?"

Mrs. Leslie hesitated.

"She is still very unlike her old self," she said. "She is not quite well yet, and—and has all sorts of fancies. Don't take any notice if—if she should not want to talk to you."

Dane nodded, and turned his head away.

"I understand," he said. "Perhaps I'd better not go?"



"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Leslie, quickly. "I want you to go; I want to try the experiment, to see if the hysteria has left her, or, at any rate, is leaving her."

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

HE had the pony phaeton brought round, and presently Lyra came down leaning on Mrs. Leslie's arm. A spasm of pain and apprehension shot through Dane's heart as he saw her. Was this his bright, light-hearted Lyra, whose very presence seemed to breathe joy and happiness; this pale, thin woman, who looked like a broken lily?

A faint color came into her lovely face; she saw him, and her eyes met his with a look of love, of deep tenderness; but it was only momentary, and her eyes dropped, and her face was averted almost instantly.

He did not offer to touch or kiss her—though he had not seen her for days—but put on a brusque air to hide his emotion.

"Here you are, then," he said.

He helped her into the carriage, and carefully arranged her cushions and wraps, and drove off slowly in a matter-of-fact fashion; but Lyra saw through his affectation of brusqueness, saw the hand that held the reins tremble.

"Now we'll go very quietly," he said; "and you needn't talk. I'll do that—that is, if you want me to."

"Yes, talk to me," she said, in a low, sad voice.

"All right," he said, with a touch of his old brightness. And as they drove along he pointed out the various noteworthy objects, explained the "lay" of the country, and dilated upon the happy summer he intended they should have. "I had a letter from the gov'nor this morning," he said. "Poor old gov'nor, he has been as cut up as any of us by your illness. But we ain't to talk of by-gones, are we? you are not ill any longer?"

"No," she murmured, almost to herself. "No; I am getting better and stronger every day." And it almost seemed as if her tone indicated regret.

It smote him to the heart, but he wisely took no notice.

"He talks of coming down to stay with us when you are quite strong again," he said.

He felt her start.

"No, no," she said.

He touched her shawl soothingly.

"All right, dear; he shall not come if you do not want him

We will just 'keep to ourselves,' as the children say. Shall I send St. Aubyn away? He is here, you know. He has gone up to town to-day."

"No, no," she said. "I should like him to stay." She sighed, and her lips quivered. "Who am I that I should rob you of your friend? You will want him—soon."

Dane glided from the topic of visitors to less exciting ones, and she lay back and listened to him, but with an absent, brooding look in her beautiful eyes which tortured him. She, herself, was undergoing torture beyond all power of words to describe. For was she not riding by his side, permitting him to lavish his love and tenderness upon her, she who was deceiving him? Not once, but a score of times, she tried to summon up courage to tell him all, but the knowledge of his great, absorbing love for her, and the mental weakness inherent to her illness, rendered her incapable. She was too weak to do anything but drift—drift toward the edge of the cataract over which she must sooner or later plunge to ruin and destruction.

"If I could have died!" was her one thought, for in death seemed her only chance of escape. They left the park which surrounded Highfield, and approached the village. It was a picturesque little place, with a church, a cluster of cottages, and the usual inn, and Lyra was eying it with listless interest, when suddenly the faint color that had crept into her face fled from it, and her eyes dilated. A man had sauntered out of the inn. It was Chandos Armitage. Dane had seen him too, and was too engrossed in his own annoyance to notice Lyra's agitation.

"Here's Chandos, of all people in the world!" he said, under his breath. "I wonder what the deuce he is doing down here?"

Mr. Chandos took his hands from the pockets of his velvet lounge coat and came up to the carriage, raising his hat and smiling sympathetically.

"Halloo, Chandos!" said Dane, with a mixture of coldness and irritation. "What are you doing down here?"

"How do you do, Lady Dane?" he said, ignoring Dane for the moment, and fixing his light eyes on Lyra's face. "I am so grieved to hear of your illness, but trust that you are on the road to recovery."

Lyra opened her lips, but no words would come, and she lay back and eyed him in silent horror, in the stupor with which the doomed bird eyes the snake.

"What am I doing here?" he went on, smiling at Dane,

but avoiding his rather stern gaze. "My reply must be the usual one. I am wandering about in search of impressions. I am writing a book—"

"Oh! ah, yes; I know," said Dane, cutting in rather abruptly. "Did you know we were down here?"

"No," lied Mr. Chandos, blandly. "I thought you had gone to Starminster. It is an unexpected pleasure."

"And you are staying at the inn?" said Dane. "I'm sorry we can't ask you to the house, but Lady Dane is still too unwell to receive visitors."

He stooped to pick up a wrap as he spoke, and Lyra felt Chandos's eyes fixed upon her with a significant frown which she fully understood. It conveyed a threat. Moistening her lips, she said, in a hollow voice:

"I—I am all right now, Dane. Ask—ask Mr."—she had almost said Barle—"Chandos to dine with us."

A faint smile of triumph curved Chandos's thin lips. In those few words she had acknowledged herself his slave.

"I should very much like to come," he said, softly, deferentially—"that is, when Lady Dane is really strong enough to have me."

"I am quite strong," she faltered.

"Well, let it stand over for the present," said Dane. "You won't think us inhospitable, Chandos? I'll send you a line when Lady Dane is really well enough—that is, if you are still staying here. But I suppose you'll be off soon; you don't stay long in one place, do you?"

"Not long, usually," said Chandos, blandly; "but"—he looked at Lyra, who seemed incapable of withdrawing her eyes from his—"this place has special attractions for me."

"I see," said Dane, gathering the reins together.

"All right; I'll write to you. Send me a copy of your book when it comes out," and he drove on.

"Confound the fellow!" he said, as he glanced at Lyra, and noticed her increased pallor. "Why couldn't he have kept out of the way? The meeting has upset you, dearest, hasn't it?"

"No," she said, avoiding the tender consideration of his eyes. "No. Why—why were you so cold to him?"

She could scarcely frame the question.

"Oh, I don't like him!" he said. "I think I told you something about his character, didn't I? I can't go into particulars; but Chandos is—well, is not a very desirable acquaintance, though I suppose we must show him decent civility. But there isn't any need to ask him to Highfield."



She breathed hard. The threat conveyed by Chandos's frown drove her on desperately.

"I—I should like him to come," she said.

He stared at her.

"Oh, you only say that because he is a relation—a cousin," he said.

Her hands writhed together under the sable rug.

"No," she said. "Why should he not come? I am quite well now, and I should not like him, or any one, to think that we were inhospitable. Ask him to come to-morrow night, Dane."

He gnawed at his mustache.

"Ask him!" she repeated, with a kind of feverish impatience which at once frightened him into acquiescence.

"Very well, dearest," he said, soothingly; "I will drop him a line. After all, you need not come down or see him, if you do not feel up to it. St. Aubyn will be down to-morrow, and he and I can entertain him. Confound him!" he added, under his breath.

Lyra sunk back and closed her eyes. When and how would it end, this horror which hung over them both like a thick, suffocating cloud?

As he helped her out of the phaeton and up the stairs to her room, she put her hand on his arm.

"You will write to—your cousin?" she said, in a low voice.

"Yes, yes," he said. Then he put his arm round her and looked wistfully into her eyes. "Give me a kiss, Lyra. It—it is a long time since you kissed me, dearest."

Her eyes filled with tears and she held her face to him; then withdrawing herself from his arms, went into her room.

The crisis was at hand; she felt it in every nerve; but instead of crushing her to the earth, as it would have done a fortnight ago, the conviction seemed to sting her into a kind of fictitious strength. The gentle stag, when brought to bay, will turn upon its pursuers; weak woman, in her dire extremity, will often display more than a giant's courage. She would gather up all her strength, would face this awful trouble, would end it one way or the other.

To Mrs. Leslie's great surprise and delight, Lyra seemed much stronger and more like herself that evening.

"It is the drive, my dear," she said, joyfully. "Please God, we shall have you quite well and strong again in a day or two."

"Oh, yes," said Lyra, absently.

Reluctantly enough, Dane sent the invitation to Chandos.

"That cousin of mine, Chandos Armitage, is staying at the inn here, and nothing would satisfy Lyra but that I must ask him to dinner to-night," he said to St. Aubyn when he came down to Highfield that same evening. "We met him lounging outside the inn, and Lyra fancied that we ought to be hospitable."

"I don't know much about him," said St. Aubyn. "But will Lady Dane be well enough to receive him?"

"I don't know; but it doesn't matter; you will help me through with him. I can't say much in his favor. Hang the fellow! he's no credit to us. A shady customer with a plausible manner that gets over people. I suppose he made an agreeable impression upon Lyra."

"Lady Dane is too clever to be taken in by any one, however plausible he may be," said St. Aubyn, quietly.

"You'd think so," said Dane, "and yet she insisted—insisted is the word—upon my asking him."

"Lady Dane is kindness itself," said St. Aubyn, laconically. "But she need not come down. She is better, you say?" and he proceeded to ask Dane particulars of the drive, just as a brother might have done.

Chandos was walking on bayonets, and he knew it. One false step and he would be ruined. But he sent an acceptance, and at half past seven appeared at Highfield, apparently as cool as a cucumber, esthetically at his ease as a man could be.

Dane received him rather coldly, and St. Aubyn, after a "How do you do?" simply ignored him. He read the man's character at a glance.

"I'm afraid Lady Dane won't be able to put in an appearance," Dane was saying, as they lounged about the drawing-room in the "terrible fifteen minutes" before dinner; but as he spoke Lyra and Mrs. Leslie entered the room.

Lyra wore a dress of some soft black material covered with lace, against which her pale face and large, sad eyes contrasted, with an effect which struck a chord that Mr. Chandos fully appreciated.

She did not shake hands with him—dinner was announced as she entered the room—and only bowed coldly, and St. Aubyn took her in.

The dinner passed pleasantly enough. Mrs. Leslie and Chandos got into an argument anent modern fiction and poetry, and kept it up during the whole of the meal, Dane and St. Aubyn listening, and Lyra sitting silent and preoccupied.

After the ladies had left the drawing-room Dane tried to make himself agreeable, though he disliked and distrusted his

cousin; but St. Aubyn sat and smoked in a grim silence that would have been creditable to a North American Indian.

Mr. Chandos watched them both under his half-closed eyes, and carefully avoided the pitfall which the old port and rare claret presented; and when Dane proposed that they should join the ladies, Mr. Chandos was—for a wonder—clear-headed.

Mrs. Leslie was at the piano when they entered the drawing-room, and Lyra was half recumbent on a couch near the window.

St. Aubyn went up to her, and in the most natural manner rearranged the cushions.

"Lord Aubyn is quite the tame cat of your household," Chandos said, with a sleek smile.

Dane turned upon him with mingled dislike and surprise.

"What do you mean?" he asked, coldly.

Chandos smiled enigmatically.

"He and Lady Dane are great friends, evidently," he said.

"Yes, they are," said Dane, simply. "St. Aubyn is the best friend I have got."

"Just so," said Chandos, and he sauntered to the piano. A very little persuasion from Mrs. Leslie induced him to play and sing, and his thin but "artful" voice floated through the room not disagreeably.

Lyra lay back and listened with half-closed eyes. She was back at the cottage, on the river once more, and the voice filled her with loathing. It became unendurable after a time, and she rose and moved toward the open window. St. Aubyn took up the Indian shawl and put it round her.

"Beware of a chill, Lady Dane," he said; "an invalid can not be too careful."

"Oh, but I am not an invalid now," she said, listlessly; and she went through the open window on to the terrace. A moment or two afterward a shadow fell across the marble pavement, and Chandos Armitage, "Geoffrey Barle," stood beside her.

"Lyra!" he said, in a low voice.

She turned, clutching the stone coping, and faced him. Her heart was beating thickly, but there was no fear in her eyes, only a dull despair, a determination to know the worst and meet it.

His pale eyes flickered and fell before her direct gaze.

"Lyra," he said, in a low voice, and with a glance over his shoulder, "what do you mean to do?"

She put her hand to her bosom as if to still the beating of her tortured heart.



"You can't—we can't go on like this," he continued.  
"You are my wife, you know."

"Your wife?" she echoed, dully.

"Yes," he said, watching her intently. "You are my wife right enough. You don't deny that—you can not—"

"No," she breathed. "I—I can not!"

He drew a breath of relief, and smiled.

"How did you come to marry my cousin Dane?" he asked.  
"You thought I was dead, I suppose?"

"Yes," she said, in a dull, stupefied way; "I thought you were dead."

He smiled.

"Well, I'm not surprised. It did look like it, didn't it? But it was mistake, you see. Mistakes will happen. The man who was drowned was a common sailor. We exchanged coats. He fell over the quay that—that afternoon we were married. I am your husband, and alive."

She shuddered and gripped the edge of the balcony.

"I am your husband in the sight of Heaven, and—what is more important—the law. I could claim you here and now."

She shrunk from him, and put out her hand as if to repudiate his claim.

"That is the fact, the plain statement of the case, my dear Lyra," he said. "I could go to that stuck-up cousin of mine, Dane, and say 'this woman is my wife.'"

She breathed hard and hid her face in her hands.

"No, no!" she panted.

"Exactly," he said. "You shrink from that, and so do I. I'm one of the family, and I don't want to make a scandal. I'll do anything to avoid it. Why, bless my soul, the world would never forget it. It would be called the 'Starminster Scandal,' and it would ruin us forever. Fancy the poor old earl thrown out of place and power; fancy Dane dishonored and despised!"

She put out her hand again pleadingly.

"Yes, of course, you see all that it means," he said. "But how are you going to avoid it?"

Her only response was a gesture of despair.

"How are you going to avoid it? There is only one way. Lyra, my dear"—she shuddered at the familiarity—"you must disappear!"

"Disappear?"

She echoed the word as if it conveyed no meaning to her.

"Yes," he said, drawing nearer and whispering in her ear.

"You must leave here—must leave Dane!"

"Leave—Dane?" she panted, in a tone of agony.

He nodded, glancing over his shoulder.

"Yes. What else can you do? You don't propose to remain on here, I suppose? No"—he smiled sardonically—"I don't think I could stand that. And you don't propose to blurt out the truth and make a scandal. That would be rather rough on Dane, who, after all, isn't to blame, for I imagine he is ignorant of our marriage."

"Yes, yes!" she breathed. "He knows nothing—nothing! Oh, if I had only told him!"

"Ah, 'these vain regrets,' as the poet says!" said Mr. Chandos. "If you had done this, or left undone the other—well, this muddle wouldn't have occurred. 'There's much virtue in an *if*,' as Shakespeare says. But what is the use of looking back or considering possibilities? You have to face the present facts. Here you are, married to two men—to me and Dane. It's true you thought yourself a widow; though, by the way, you might have waited a year or two."

She pressed her hands to her face.

"I—I was never your wife!" she panted. "You tricked, betrayed me into a marriage. I was your wife in name only!"

He smiled.

"And in law, my dear Lyra," he said. "Don't forget that. As I said, I could claim you and take you away at this moment. I could force you to come with me."

"No, no!" she panted, shudderingly, and shrinking from him and his pale eyes, which were glittering threateningly.

"Don't be afraid," he said, "and don't speak so loudly. One of them, Dane or that man St. Aubyn, will hear you and come out, and the fat will be in the fire." Certainly, Chandos had not been improved by his continental wanderings. "One word from me, and you are ruined, and Dane is the laughing-stock of the world."

"No, no! spare him!" she moaned.

"I propose doing so," said Chandos. "See here."

He took her hand, but she shook him off.

"Don't touch me," she said, with a shudder. "I—I will listen to you, I may do what you tell me, but—but don't touch me."

"You must leave Dane," he said, in a low, impressive voice; "you must leave him to-morrow. You have money, I suppose?"

She made a gesture of assent. Dane had opened a banking account for her. The income of her settlement money, a fairly large amount, stood to her credit.

"Very well; nothing is easier for you than to disappear. You can go to London and lie by there quietly until the fuss and excitement have cooled down. Then you can cross to the Continent. In one of the small towns in Normandy or Brittany you can live very cheaply and quietly."

She turned upon him suddenly with a kind of fierce determination.

"And you? You—you will not persecute me, will not follow me?"

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled the cynical, self-satisfied smile which is so hateful in a man.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear Lyra. My—shall I call it fancy?—has evaporated long ago. I shall not persecute you, as you phrase it. I shall simply let you go your own way; and I give you my solemn promise that while you keep out of the way and hold your tongue, I will hold mine."

She laid her forehead on her hands and tried to think. After all, beat her weary brain as she might, was there any alternative course to that which he proposed? She could not stay longer with Dane, unless she were utterly reckless and abandoned. She could not tell him the truth, and so cover him with the shame of her own disgrace and dishonor. No; there was only one thing possible—flight.

Dane's voice was heard behind them; he was coming on to the terrace with St. Aubyn. She raised her head and looked, like a hunted animal, from side to side.

"Quick!" whispered Chandos, thickly. "Which is it to be—yes, or no?"

"Yes, yes; I will go," she panted; then staggered away from him and entered the house by a lower window.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

LYRA lay awake all that night, a prey to the despair which nerves one to action.

Whichever way she looked, no course seemed open to her but that which Chandos had suggested, and which, ever since his reappearance, had again and again, though vaguely, occurred to her.

She must leave Dane, must leave him in ignorance of the cause of her flight. Let him think what he would of her—the worst, if it must be—but the truth he must never learn. The least she could do was to spare his honored name from such a scandal as the disclosure of her double marriage could bring down upon him. If the world remained ignorant of the



cause of her flight, it would blame her alone, and have only pity for him; but if it were known that he had been "tricked" into a bigamous marriage, it would treat him with scorn and contempt, the mere thought of which almost drove her mad as she lay in the silence and solitude of the night.

Yes, there was nothing else for her. It was impossible for her to confess, impossible for her to remain, even though Dane should forgive her; for was she not Chandos Armitage's wife?

To doubt of the legality of the marriage that had taken place in the old church never occurred to her; and even if it had done so, she would not have dared to question it. To whom could she go with her story?

Toward morning she fell into an uneasy, dream-haunted sleep, and awoke to find Mrs. Leslie, who slept in an adjoining room, standing beside her bed.

Lyra started—the start of the guilty—and raised herself on her elbow, with a look of terror in her eyes.

"What—what is it?" she breathed, looking at a letter which Mrs. Leslie held in her hand.

"Oh, my dear, I have startled you!" said Mrs. Leslie, with self-reproach. "Don't be frightened. I came in to show you a letter that I have just had from Theodosia."

Lyra fell back with a sigh of relief.

"Is it bad news?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Well, it is," replied Mrs. Leslie, anxiously. "She has sprained her ankle coming down the stairs of one of those wretched cottages."

"I am sorry," said Lyra. "You must go to her at once."

Mrs. Leslie looked troubled and uncertain.

"Well, she does not ask me to go, indeed she says I am on no account to leave you; but I know she would like me with her. But I won't leave you, Lyra, dear."

"You must go by the first train," Lyra said, in a tone of quiet decision which rather surprised Mrs. Leslie. "Of course you must go. I am much better, quite well now, and I would not have you stay. I will get up at once. Poor Theodosia! Why can not I go?" Then she turned her face away and stifled a moan. She would never see Theodosia again! "I will get up at once. It is late."

Mrs. Leslie looked at her watch.

"It is, rather; you have had a long sleep, I am glad to say, my dear. And you are sure that you are well enough for me to leave you?"

Lyra, by way of reply got out of bed.

"Oh, yes, yes," she said. "You *must* go, even if I were at death's door."

"I should scarcely leave you then; but I am glad to say that you are very far from death's door now, dear," Mrs. Leslie said, with a smile; and she kissed her.

Lyra was about to return the kiss, but checked herself, and turned away with a sigh.

"I am not fit to kiss her," was her reflection.

Mrs. Leslie had only time to snatch a hasty breakfast, and Dane drove her to the station before Lyra came down. Breakfast was a "go-as-you-please" meal at Highfield, and St. Aubyn was seated at the table with his coffee and toast. He rose and laid down the paper as Lyra entered, his grave eyes scanning her face. Something in it awakened his anxiety, an indefinable expression which he remembered later on.

"Ought you to get up so early, Lady Dane?" he said, earnestly, as he put a chair for her. "I think you must have been tired last night; wouldn't it have been wiser to have taken a long rest this morning?"

She shook her head.

"No; I am quite well and strong now," she said; and her voice struck him as the expression of her face had done.

"You can't be too careful," he said. While they had been speaking he had got a warm plate for her, and her cup; Dane did not like servants about the breakfast-table. "What shall I give you? An omelet?—some fish?"

She accepted some fish, but scarcely made a pretense of eating it. He adjusted the blind so that the sunlight should not fall in her eyes, poured out her tea, and put a footstool for her, all in his usual quiet, matter-of-course, and unobtrusive fashion.

"I hope we did not disturb you as we came up last night," he said.

"No," she said, absently. "Were you late?"

"Well, we were, rather," he said. He paused a moment. "Mr. Chandos Armitage engaged in an argument in the smoking-room."

She shuddered slightly at the sound of his name.

"Yes?" she said, faintly. "What was it about?"

"Oh, I happened to mention the trouble those poaching fellows are giving my people at my place, and Mr. Chandos maintained that I was not doing my duty, because I had not given orders to my keepers to shoot the poachers. I've always noticed that your gentle poet is generally a most blood-thirsty individual."

"You don't like him?" she said, in a low voice, and half mechanically.

St. Aubyn colored and laughed shortly.

"How did you discover that?" he asked, with some surprise. "I had flattered myself that I had concealed my feelings quite cleverly. Well, no; to be candid, I don't like him. I hope you'll forgive me for disliking so near a relation of yours."

Lyra started.

"Near relation?" she breathed. "Ah, yes, he—he is Dane's cousin. I forgot."

"Yes," said St. Aubyn, "and I wish he were not. If I might venture, I should say that he has not found much favor in your sight, Lady Dane?"

Lyra knit her hands together.

"I—I don't know. Why do you say that?" she demanded, with a kind of repressed fear.

St. Aubyn smiled.

"For the same reason that you said the same of me. You see, I know you so well that I have learned to read your face," he replied, quite naturally. "I think, with you, that Chandos is a particularly disagreeable person, the sort of man—" he stopped.

"Go on," she said, in a low voice.

He laughed apologetically.

"Well, I was going to say that I should be sorry to put any trust in Mr. Chandos, and I should be still more sorry to have to depend on him. There are some men"—he went on, reflectively—"who are always trying to wear a mask, always endeavoring to keep their character from showing itself in their face, but who never succeed. Mr. Chandos is one of them. He is a most amusing, accomplished person—with the mask on. Last night, in the smoking-room"—he paused. If Lyra had been a man he would have added, "and with the whisky in"—"he dropped the mask and allowed Dane and me to catch a glimpse of his real self, and—well, we both agreed that Mr. Chandos's professions of sentiment and noble feeling were mere shams, and that there was a very nice mixture of the monkey and the tiger in him, cunning and cruelty. But"—and he colored—"I ought not to say that to you, Lady Dane."

"Yes, it is quite true," she said, more to herself than to him.

St. Aubyn looked at her with surprise.

"You speak as if you knew him—had heard him talk, as



we heard him talk last night, when he was off his guard," he said.

She rose, then sunk down again.

"What are you reading in the paper?" she asked. He understood that she wished to change the conversation.

"The Landcross case," he said. "I suppose you have not seen anything of it, though?"

She shook her head absently.

"No. What is it?"

"A very unhappy and melancholy one," he said. "Lady Landcross has left her husband." He did not want to continue the subject, which he was sorry he had commenced.

"Left her husband?" she repeated.

"Yes; it is a singular case. I don't think it would interest you. The melancholy part of it is that she fled from him owing to a misunderstanding."

Lyra bent her eyes upon her cup.

"A misunderstanding?"

"Yes; the unfortunate woman had concealed from him an incident in her life that had occurred before their marriage, and, under the impression that she had brought dishonor upon him, she left her home. She caught cold during her flight, poor woman, and died."

"Unfortunate?" she breathed. "You pity her?"

St. Aubyn looked at her with surprise.

"Why, yes! Do not you?"

"No," she said, in a low voice; "you forget. *She died!* She was happy in that."

St. Aubyn stared at her.

"But it was all a misconception," he said. "If she had but confided in him and told him everything, all would have been set right, and she might be living still, and as happy as a woman could be. I knew her—both of them—very well," he went on, musingly. "They were devoted to each other, apparently, hadn't a thought that wasn't common to them. They were as fond of each other as—as you and Dane are. Poor Landcross is almost beside himself with grief."

The color rose to Lyra's pale face, then died away, all but two hectic spots on her cheeks, which made her large, sad eyes appear unnaturally bright.

"She only thought she was bringing dishonor upon her husband," she said, after a pause, and with her eyes still down-cast. "But suppose she had been right—suppose that by flight she could have spared him—would she not have been right in leaving him, in disappearing? Should not"—she

raised her eyes, but he had risen and was standing, looking out of the window, and did not meet them—"should not a woman's first thought and care be the honor of her husband—the man she loves?"

He was thinking of the woman—his own wife—who had brought dishonor to him, had darkened his whole life, and his voice sounded cold and almost stern as he answered:

"Yes; her husband's honor—his good name before the world—should be dearer than her own life, and it is so in the heart of every true wife."

Lyra rose and stood with her back turned to him, her hand grasping the back of her chair, her bosom heaving with suppressed emotion. It was as if she had heard the sentence of death pronounced upon her.

As she moved toward the door the dog-cart drove up, and Dane entered the hall and came into the room.

His face lighted up with a smile at sight of her.

"You up?" he said; then as he saw her white face and anguished eyes, the smile died away. "What is the matter, dearest?" he asked, putting his arm round her as St. Aubyn walked out through the open window.

She suffered Dane's embrace for a moment, then put his arm gently from her.

"I—I am tired this morning," she faltered.

"Why did you get up?" he said, at once. "Go and lie down. I wish I had not let Mrs. Leslie go; shall I wire for her to come back? Will you have the doctor?"

"No, no," she said; and she forced a smile. "I will go to my room and rest. I will not come down again."

His face fell; but he assented tenderly, unselfishly.

"Do not. I will see that the house is kept quiet, and that no one shall disturb you. I was going to ride over to Starminster, getting back to dinner—there is something the steward wants to see me about—but I won't go now."

"Yes," she said, laying her hand on his arm, the two spots burning in her cheeks again—"yes, I wish you to go. I wish you to; and—and"—her voice faltered—"I will come down to dinner—if I can."

The last words were almost inaudible.

"Will you?" he said, wistfully. "But you must not over-exert yourself, dearest. I will come up and see how you are when I come back."

He kissed her and held her to him, and suddenly she raised her head, looked him full in the eyes, and put her lips to his. The poor fellow's face flushed like a boy's and his heart leaped.

He was as much in love with her—more, if that were possible—than on the day before their marriage.

The flush was still on his face when he went out in search of St. Aubyn. He found him seated on a bench, his head bowed, a dark frown on his face. He looked up with an absent expression as Dane approached.

“Lyra has gone to her room; she is not strong yet. But she is coming down to dinner.” He paused a moment, then added, in a low voice that thrilled with gratitude: “Do you know, old fellow, that though she is still weak, I think that hysteria is leaving her.” He could feel Lyra’s kiss still on his lips. “Yes, thank God, we shall have her like her old self again! Will you come over to Starminster with me?”

St. Aubyn shook his head. He was trying to cast off the black fit which the memory of his great trouble had caused, but had not yet succeeded. He wanted to be alone for an hour or two.

“I think not,” he said. “I have some letters to write;” and he walked away.

“Poor old chap!” murmured Dane, as he went off to the stables.

A quarter of an hour afterward he rode off in a brighter and more hopeful mood than he had been in since Lyra’s illness.

Lyra went up to her room. The weakness which had almost brought her to the ground in the breakfast-room had left her, and the strength of despair had again come to her aid. St. Aubyn was right—a woman’s first thought should be for her husband’s good name. His honor should be dearer to her than life. The only way of saving Dane was by flight. She must go. She threw herself on her knees beside the bed and tried to plan out her course; but alas!—alas! for some time she could only recall the happy past.

“A sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remembering happy things.”

It seemed that every loving word Dane had ever spoken to her came hurrying across her brain. What would he do when he learned that she had left him?

The day passed slowly; the maid brought her some lunch, but Lyra was lying on the bed apparently asleep, and the maid, afraid of waking her, set the tray on the table, and stole out on tiptoe. Toward the afternoon some clouds came up in the sky from the west, and the summer’s brightness grew dull and overcast. A soft drizzle set in. She rose about five o’clock and packed a few things in a hand-bag, then exchanged the simple but bright and costly morning frock for a



dark serge gown, and put a thick veil over her hat. She was feeling faint, and the sight of the luncheon tray reminded her that she had eaten nothing since breakfast, and that she could not carry out her resolve without food. She forced herself to eat something, though every mouthful threatened to choke her; then sat down to nerve herself for flight.

She knew that a train left Highfield at six, and she knew that, in all probability, she could reach the station by the private path through the park unseen. Her plan—if the confused, nebulous idea that surged through her brain deserved such a title—was to go to London. She had money—some of her own was still left. In London she could hide until—well, until she could find some situation abroad.

She meant to go without a word, but at the last moment this resolution broke down before the remembrance of Dane's love. She wrote a few words, inclosed them in an envelope addressed to him, and laid it on the top of the jewel case on the dressing-table. In this case she had put all the jewelry she usually wore (the diamonds and pearls were at the bank), and she tried to take the wedding-ring from her finger, but she could not; with a heart-broken cry, she put her hand, with the ring still on, behind her.

The rain increased, the dullness grew almost into darkness; but she did not notice the weather. As usual, the house was very still and quiet, but she crept down the broad stairs as if a crowd of detectives were listening for her footsteps, and when she had crossed the hall and passed out at the wide-open door, she ran unsteadily to the shelter of the shrubbery, and stood there, looking back at the house with eyes that were blinded with unshed tears.

The private path through the park was seldom used, and she made her way along it without meeting any one. Just as she reached the end of it, and was entering upon the road, she thought she heard footsteps in the wood on her left. She stopped and put her hand to her bosom; her heart was thumping; but the footsteps, if the sound proceeded from them, ceased; and after a minute's hesitation, during which she felt like a thief, she went rapidly on.

As she passed through the wicket gate, with its inscription, "private," Mr. Chandos stepped out on to the path and stole rapidly after her. He stopped at the gate and watched her, then drew back with a flickering smile of satisfaction.

"By Heaven, she *has* gone!" he muttered.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Now, strange to say, Mr. Chandos was on his way to the house to see her and to beg her to remain. Chandos Armitage, it need not be said, was a coward at heart. He had spent a bad night, the result of too much whisky—and *new* whisky—consumed after he had reached the inn, and had woken with that feeling of oppression and depression which copious draughts of bad spirits usually produce. He fell to thinking as he rolled his hot head on the pillow, and he came to the conclusion that, to use his own words, he “was playing a devilish dangerous game.”

Mr. Chandos valued his own skin even above the chance of coming into the title; and it flashed upon him, in the waking hours, that Dane was not the sort of man to let Lyra go without following her; that in all probability he would come up with her; then an explanation—a full explanation—of the cause of her flight would fall from Lyra; and then— Well, Chandos had a wholesome dread of both Dane and the law.

So far as the latter was concerned, he might, it was true, try bluster, and assert that the marriage in the old church was a legal one; but even if he escaped the law, there was Dane to deal with; and Chandos shuddered as he reflected upon Dane's strength, and the readiness with which Dane, when his passion was aroused, was accustomed to use it. Dane had once given him a severe thrashing when they were lads, and Chandos remembered it with an extraordinary vividness.

Yes, he had concluded, it would be better to let matters slide, and leave Lyra in peace. Perhaps she or Dane might die, perhaps there might not be any son and heir born to come between Mr. Chandos and the title. Anyway, it was too dangerous a game to play.

He had not risen till late, and had strolled about all the morning to get rid of his headache, and when his nerves were a little steadier, and his hand not quite so shaky, he had made his way through the wood, in the hope of reaching the house and seeing Lyra without being seen by any one else.

And now she was gone! Her dark dress, thick veil, and the small bag were evidences that it was indeed a flight.

He leaned against a tree and wiped the sweat from his brow, as he tried to decide what course to adopt. Should he follow her to the station and persuade her to return to the house, on the assurance of his secrecy? But would she be persuaded?

He knew that it was not selfish fear that had prompted her to consent to his proposition. He knew that she was "disappearing," because she believed that by so doing she should spare Dane.

"No," he thought; "she won't come back. There'll be a scene at the station. She'll faint or go into hysterics at the sight of me, and then— But, curse it! I must chance it!"

He went quickly through the gate, and was hurrying along the road to the station when he heard the rattle of the train. He must have remained in the wood, considering matters, longer than he thought. With an oath he pulled up and stared at the train as it dashed by on the embankment before him.

"Should he follow her to London?" he asked himself. Anyway, whether he tried to find her or not, he was off by the next train.

He turned, and was speeding to the inn to pack his portmanteau, when a tall figure came striding out of a lane before him. It was St. Aubyn.

Mr. Chandos started guiltily and bit his lip nervously. Of course, Lyra's flight was already discovered, and here was "that fellow" on the trail!

He forced a sickly smile as St. Aubyn approached, and greeted him as blandly and carelessly as he could.

St. Aubyn nodded, and seemed as if he were going to pass on; but he stopped, as if by an afterthought.

"How do you do, Mr. Armitage? Are you going to the house?"

His tone was grave and preoccupied, and Chandos noticed that he looked serious and thoughtful.

"No—that is—yes!" said Chandos, with an involuntary stammer.

St. Aubyn looked at him uncertainly, as if hesitating and doubtful as to some course of action depending on Chandos's reply.

"You are?" he said.

"Yes," said Chandos, more boldly. "I was going to inquire after Lady Dane. I trust that she is none the worse for her kind exertion last night?"

He fixed his pale eyes keenly on St. Aubyn's face.

St. Aubyn hesitated a moment.

"Lady Dane is not to talk to-day, and is confined to her room," he said. "I am afraid she will not be able to see you."

He wanted to save Lyra from even the chance of meeting with the precious Mr. Chandos.



"Oh, I am sorry—very sorry!" said Chandos, in his sleekest, most sympathetic tones.

"Yes," said St. Aubyn, absently. He looked toward the station. "Was that the London train just passed?" he asked.

Mr. Chandos shot a keen glance at him. He did know, then!

"Yes," he said. "It has just gone. I suppose you didn't want to travel by it?" and he looked at St. Aubyn's tweed suit of knickerbockers and gaiters.

"Yes, I did," said St. Aubyn.

Mr. Chandos started and stared at him.

"Well, that's cool, at any rate," he thought.

St. Aubyn noticed neither the start nor stare.

"I have just had a telegram calling me home," he said.

"You may remember my telling Dane and you about the poachers at my place?"

"Yes," said Chandos, still staring.

"It seems that there was an affray last night between my men and the poachers, and some rough work between them—bloodshed, I'm afraid. I met the telegraph boy in the lane just now, and I think I ought to go at once."

"Well," thought Mr. Chandos, with a kind of contempt, "you are about the poorest hand at a plausible lie I have ever met." But aloud he said in a sympathetic tone: "Of course—of course; but the train has just gone."

"The London one," said St. Aubyn. "But I can catch the next that goes to Howford Junction, and get across to my place by a train from there."

"Yes," said Mr. Chandos; "I suppose you can."

"I trouble you with all this," went on St. Aubyn, "because I thought, if you were going to the house, you would kindly take a message to Dane, and tell him about the telegram, and that I have caught the next train. He needn't send my things on, as I will come back as soon as I can."

Mr. Chandos could have laughed outright, but he kept a perfectly serious countenance.

"Certainly," he said; "I will explain the whole matter to him. I'm very sorry you should have to rush off, and on such unpleasant business."

St. Aubyn didn't want Mr. Chandos Armitage's sympathy.

"Thanks," he said, coldly; and with a nod, but with no offer of his hand, he strode on.

Mr. Chandos turned into the road and stood up under a tree, and indulged in a free, unrestrained chuckle.

It all seemed so plain to him as he recalled St. Aubyn's un-

concealed devotion to Lyra. She had decided to fly from Dane, but not alone. No; she was going to take St. Aubyn with her.

To any other man or woman who knew Lyra, the idea would at once have appeared preposterous; but the evil are only too ready to believe the existence of evil in others; and Mr. Chandos would have been quite ready, if required, to stake his life on the correctness of his hypothesis.

Yes, that was it. Lyra, seeing that she must leave Dane, had bolted with Lord St. Aubyn.

"And I thought last night that she was so terribly cut up that I almost pitied her! Lord! what deceitful creatures women are!"

Then, as he pondered over the situation, his brain began to glow. Lyra fled, Dane would not be likely to marry again. He, Chandos, would be Earl of Starminster, after all.

He forgot the time as he paced up and down, his face flushed, his eyes blinking with pleasant satisfaction. Really, Fate was dealing very kindly with him, very.

He lighted a cigarette with some difficulty, and enjoyed himself amazingly for a quarter of an hour; then he brought himself back to business. He must go to the house and see the drama played out, that was certain. Putting on his usual soft, sleek, contemplative smile, the smile which always suggested sonnets and verses to his female admirers, he walked through the park and entered the hall.

"Is Lord Dane in?" he was asking, blandly, when he heard the clatter of horse-hoofs, and Dane rode up.

"Halloo, Chandos!" he said, very much more pleasantly than he had greeted him a few days ago. "Turned out wet, hasn't it? I've had a soaker;" and he stood on the steps and shook himself, as he had shaken himself that day by the stream up the Taw valley. "You look wet, too."

"Yes; I have been walking, and looked in on my way back to ask after Lady Dane."

Dane nodded. He forgot his dislike for Chandos in his appreciation of the little attention. Through Lyra was always the nearest way to Dane's heart.

"Thanks. I hope to find her much better. She was rather tired this morning. Come in."

"I am so sorry," said Mr. Chandos, sleekly, as he followed Dane into his own den. "I'm afraid the presence of a visitor—"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Dane, pulling off his boots. "I've been away all day. Just wait, will you? If she is not

able to dine with us, I'll ask you to stay, and we'll have a bachelor's dinner."

"Oh! will you?" thought Mr. Chandos; but he looked very grateful and pleased.

"I must go and change," he said.

Dane, humming a line—that kiss of Lyra's was not yet forgotten!—tossed him a box of cigarettes.

"Wait a moment or two," he said. "I'll go and inquire."

Mr. Chandos lighted a cigarette with rather a tremulous hand. Was the storm going to break already? Would there be time for St. Aubyn to get off by that train before Dane was on his track?

Dane went up the stairs, and met Lyra's maid in the corridor which ran round the upper portion of the hall.

"How is your mistress?" he asked, eagerly.

"I've not seen her ladyship since lunch, my lord," she replied. "She was asleep then, and I think she has fallen asleep again, for she did not answer when I knocked just now. I trust that she is asleep, my lord."

Dane nodded and went on. He stopped at Lyra's room and knocked at the door softly, then receiving no answer, opened it. The light was fading, but he saw Lyra's gown where she had thrown it on the bed, and thought that she was lying there.

He took a step into the room, then stopped. Of late Lyra had started at his approach. He would not awake her suddenly and startle her. He closed the door after him, and went down-stairs to Chandos.

"She is asleep, I am glad to say. I don't think I shall let her come down to dinner to-night. You'd better stay. I'll send to the inn for your things."

And taking Chandos's acceptance as a matter of course, he gave directions to a footman to show Mr. Chandos to a room, and to send to the inn.

The dress clothes came in due course, and Mr. Chandos exchanged his wet walking suit for them. He felt chilled and apprehensive, and longed with a longing beyond words for a good stiff glass of neat brandy. The dinner-bell rang and he went down, and a few moments afterward Dane entered the drawing-room.

"Halloo!" he said; "where is St. Aubyn? Is Lord St. Aubyn down yet?" he inquired of the butler.

"Lord St. Aubyn is not in the house, my lord," was the reply. "His lordship has not been in all day."

Dane grew momentarily serious: then his face cleared.



"We won't wait," he said. "He will be in directly, and he hates to have dinner kept waiting for him."

Dane and Chandos went into the dining-room, and the meal commenced. Dane was in the best of spirits—for the first time since her illness his darling had given him back kiss for kiss—and listened with wonderful patience to Mr. Chandos's account of the pictures in the gallery at Madrid.

"What the deuce made you go there?" he said once; and Mr. Chandos colored and started. "And why didn't you write to some one? We all thought you were dead."

Mr. Chandos took a long draught of wine and laughed feebly. All the time he had been talking, he had been listening "with his third ear," as the Italians say, waiting for the moment of the discovery of Lyra's flight; and when Dane rose and said, "Excuse me a moment," he set his wine-glass down so suddenly that it snapped at the stem.

Dane laughed as he left the room.

"I wouldn't give much for your nerves," he said.

He would have given less if he could have seen Mr. Chandos's face during the suspense of the next few minutes, in the interval between Dane's exit and his re-entrance with the letter in his hand.

White to the lips, with an awful look in his face, Dane stood with his back to the door looking, not at Chandos, but beyond him, into vacancy.

"My God! what is the matter?" Chandos faltered out.

Dane did not seem to hear him, but still stood, his back to the door, as if to prevent any one entering. The servant had left the room after the placing of the dessert, and the two gentlemen were alone.

"What is it?" gasped Chandos, his terror passing very well for surprise.

Dane put his hand to his brow and staggered to the table.

"She has gone," he said, more to himself than to Chandos.

"Gone!"

"Gone!" stammered Chandos. "Who—who?"

Dane let his head fall upon his breast and groaned. Great drops of sweat stood on his brow, his lips writhed, his face was convulsed. Mr. Chandos thought that the stricken man would have a fit, and with a trembling hand poured out some wine and held the glass to him.

Dane took it mechanically and as mechanically set it on the table. Then he rose from the chair and confronted Chandos.

"Do—do you know of anything—do you? Oh, my God, am I mad or dreaming? Lyra—*my* Lyra—gone, left me!"

Some one—one of the servants—turned the handle of the door. Dane signed to Chandos and he ran forward and turned the key.

“What—what on earth do you mean? What are you talking about?” he asked, shivering.

Dane held out the note to him, but as Chandos went to take it, he drew his hand back.

“No, no!” he cried, in a kind of jealous rage. “You shall not see it! It—it is from her to me—me alone! Why do you stand gaping there? Why don’t you do something?”

He fell into the chair again and dropped his head on his hands, unconscious that the note had fallen from his fingers.

Mr. Chandos stole up and stealthily picked it up and read it. It ran thus:

“I am going forever. I can not stay. Do not think too badly of me, Dane. Pity and forgive me.”

There was no signature, not even “Lyra.”

Mr. Chandos laid the note on the table.

“Calm yourself, Dane,” he stammered. “Perhaps some of the servants—”

Dane raised his head and looked at him.

“Why has she gone?” he asked—not Chandos, but himself.

Chandos ventured to play a card very nervously.

“Perhaps—perhaps Lord St. Aubyn could tell us,” he said, hesitatingly. “They—they were such great friends—”

Dane did not grasp the hideous insinuation for a moment, then, as it dawned upon his bewildered, benumbed brain, he sprung from his seat and seized Chandos; but his hand fell even as it was raised to strike him to the ground, and he burst into a hoarse laugh.

“You miserable cur!” he said, almost quietly. “You don’t know her, you don’t know him, or you would laugh as I do at such a suggestion. Lyra!—St. Aubyn! The purest woman on God’s earth, the most honorable of men!” He laughed aloud.

“I—I suggested nothing,” faltered Chandos, rubbing the part of his arm which Dane had clutched. “I only said he might know. They *were* great friends, weren’t they? They were like brother and sister—”

Dane looked at him—a strange look.

“Go on!” he said, hoarsely.

“That’s all,” said Chandos. “I wish I’d asked St. Aubyn where he was going, and when he’d come back.”

“When did you see him? Where?” demanded Dane.

"I saw him going to the station. Let me see—what time was it? Just before the six o'clock train, I think; but I'm so confused and upset."

"Going to the station?" said Dane. "Are you sure? Why should he be going there? Why didn't he come back to dinner?"

Mr. Chandos shook his head meekly.

"Don't you know?" he said. "Hasn't he left any message for you?"

Dane did not answer. The insinuation conveyed in the question was working its way like subtle poison.

"D—n you!" he cried, in an agony of passion. "Speak out! Do you dare to hint—" Then he stopped, and broke into a wild, desperate laugh.

"We are both playing the fool!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, wiping the sweat from his wet face. "I can see it all. It's—it's as plain as a pike-staff. An attack of hysteria has seized her, and she has gone to Dosie's! I ought not to have let Mrs. Leslie go. My poor darling! My poor darling!"

He strode to the bell.

Mr. Chandos ventured to touch his arm.

"What—what are you going to do?"

"Order the carriage and drive to Castle Towers," said Dane, almost calmly.

"I—I wouldn't," stammered Chandos. "If—I were you I should keep the affair quiet till—well, till morning. If—if anything should be wrong—"

Dane set his teeth hard.

"See here, Chandos," he said, "I'm not in the mood to be patient. I'm very much upset—naturally—by my wife's illness, and—and—oh! my God!"—he broke off with a cry of agony—"I must do something; I must have her in my arms—safe in my arms—before morning, or I shall go mad!"

He rang the bell as Mr. Chandos unlocked the door.

"The break and pair," he said. "Her ladyship has gone to Castle Towers"—a happy idea struck him—"Lady Theodosia is worse."

In less than half an hour he was driving through the night at desperate speed toward Castle Towers, and away from Lyra.

St. Aubyn got into the train very reluctantly, for notwithstanding the urgency of the telegram, he felt a strange unwillingness to leave Highfield—strange, because he had no special reason for his reluctance beyond his desire for Dane's and Lyra's company—that is, no reason he could formulate. But



there was something intangible—something vague and unsubstantial—which weighed on his mind and made him uneasy.

It was nothing more than the strange expression in Lyra's eyes, the singular tone of her voice, while she had been speaking with him at breakfast.

It haunted him and made him uncomfortable, almost to the point of wretchedness, as he leaned back in the carriage and smoked the strong Cavendish which he favored.

He reached the junction, and got out to wait for the train that would take him across country to his own station. It was still raining, one of those miserable nights which even in summer remind us that we English, though so highly favored in other respects, have "absolutely no climate."

Howford is a wretched station, one of those which are a disgrace to the push of the nineteenth century. It was draughty, and not overclean. There was a miserable apology for a waiting-room, and a still more miserable refreshment-room.

St. Aubyn went into the latter and asked for a cup of coffee, and the young lady behind the bar eyed him for a moment, more in sorrow than in anger, and then informed him that there was none, but that he could have "anything else."

St. Aubyn, who had no desire to be poisoned, went out and paced the wet and draughty platform. As he did so, he glanced through the glass door, then stopped.

A lady was sitting there—a lady in a dark dress and wearing a thick veil—and it actually seemed to him that there was something about her—her figure, or her pose as she leaned forward with her hands clasped on her lap—like Lady Dane.

He walked on, and smiled at the idea.

"I'll tell her about it when I get back. Perhaps it will make her laugh," he said. "It is a long time since she has laughed;" and he sighed involuntarily.

So absurd did the idea seem—that a solitary woman at Howford Junction should be like the peerless Lyra—that he purposely refrained from bestowing another glance at the waiting-room as he paced up and down.

His train came up at last; there appeared to be no other passengers besides himself—for the lady did not come out of the waiting-room as the train drew up—and he was getting into a smoking-compartment, the door of which a sleepy and sulky porter opened for him, when he heard him say:

"Barnstaple, ma'am? Yes, change at Leoford." And looking out, he saw the lady get into the next carriage. He was sinking back against the cushions when he heard a voice say:

"My bag."

He sat for a moment spell-bound, then he sprung to his feet. It was Lyra's voice.

"Great Heaven!" he said, aloud. "What an extraordinary thing. She is not only like her but has her voice."

Obeying the impulse of the moment, he leaped from the carriage and snatched from the porter's hand the bag he had fetched from the waiting-room.

"I'll give it to the lady," he said; and as the train moved on he got into the same compartment.

"Here is your bag—" he began, but a faint cry stopped him. She had shrunk from him with her hands held out as if to keep him back.

He caught the hands and bent forward to look into her face. The light was—of course—bad, but he recognized her.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "Lyra—Lady Dane!"

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

LYRA uttered a low cry and tried to take her hands from St. Aubyn's grasp; but he held them tightly, and continued to look at her in silent amazement. It did seem to him incredible that she should be there, alone.

"Lady Dane," he said at last. "Is it possible? How did you come here? Why are you here alone? Where is Dane?"

Lyra shrunk into a corner and hid her face in her hands.

St. Aubyn did not know what to say or do. He could scarcely yet realize the fact of her presence.

"Has anything happened? Have you heard bad news?" he asked, gently and anxiously.

"Yes," she breathed; "something has happened."

"You have been sent for by some relation who is ill?" he suggested. "Why has not Dane come with you? You ought not to be traveling alone. But perhaps your maid is in another carriage."

Lyra shook her head.

"No? Forgive me, Lady Dane, but—but I am terribly anxious. Will you not tell me what has happened?"

"I—I can not!" she said in a low, almost inaudible voice.

"I—I have left—Highfield." She could not bring herself to pronounce Dane's name.

"Left Highfield!" echoed St. Aubyn, in amazement.

"Left—Great Heaven! I must misunderstand you!" He looked at the dark dress, the thick veil which she still kept

down. "Why have you left Highfield, and at this time of night?"

"I—I can not tell you," she replied. "Don't ask me. Leave me."

St. Aubyn shook his head.

"Leave you, and alone! That is impossible," he said.

"Lady Dane, you are in trouble of some sort. Will you not tell me, confide in me?"

"No!" she said as if she were desperate; "I can confide in no one. I am in trouble, yes; but no one can help me."

"Not even Dane?" he said, in a low, grave voice.

She put her hand to her eyes.

"Not even—Dane," she murmured.

He thought a moment.

"Have you quarreled?" he asked. "But that is an absurd question."

She shook her head.

"No; oh, no, no!"

"I knew that could not have happened," he said. "What is it, then? Whatever it is, it must have occurred quite recently. You—you were all right and happy this morning, were you not?" he asked, as the remembrance of the expression of her face and the tone of her voice at breakfast flashed upon him.

"Happy!" she echoed, with intense misery; "happy! In all the world there is no one so unhappy, so wretched as I am, and have been!"

The confession was forced from her, and startled him by the intensity of its despair.

"Great Heaven!" he murmured. "And you will not tell me?"

She shook her head.

"At least tell me where you are going?"

"To London," she said.

"But this train does not go to London," he said.

She put her hand to her head. It was evident to him that she did not know it—that she scarcely knew where she was going.

"You were going to London, to friends?" he said. "But you can not reach it by this train, and for hours to come what will you do? Lady Dane, I beg—I implore you, if you can not confide in me, to let me take you back home."

"No, no!" she panted; "I can not! It is too late; I can never go back. Oh, believe that, and—and do not ask me any more questions! Leave me."



"Yes, I must ask you one more," he said. He paused, then went on, in a low voice full of suppressed emotion, his eyes fixed on hers, which gleamed through the veil. "And, Lady Dane, do you know why I feel that I have a right to ask you? Do you remember one day when we were talking of friendship between man and woman, and you let me say that I hoped to prove myself your friend?"

She made a gesture of assent with her hand.

"It is a sacred word, but it does not go far enough to describe my feelings. Lady Dane"—he paused—"do you remember the first day we met? I came into your presence unwillingly enough. I was a woman-hater. I had suffered the cruelest wrong that a man can suffer at the hands of a woman. I had a wife whom I loved—" His voice grew hoarse and broken. "But you know my story; it is all too common. The day she left me I cursed her and all her sex. The face of a woman, no matter how beautiful it was, was but to me the mask worn by a devil. I think that I would not have stretched out my hand to save one of them from a painful death. You see, I speak plainly. That day I came up into the balcony there at Rome and saw you, I wished that I had pretended not to see Dane, my old and tried friend, and gone on my way. You were to me just one of the sex I hated, and I meant to go as quickly as possible and get out of your way. But I stayed. I saw you again and again, and gradually but surely a change was wrought in me. My eyes were opened, and I saw what a fool and cur I was to deem all women bad because one had proved vile."

He paused and moistened his lips.

"You had wrought that change in me. It was the charm of your goodness which had performed the miracle on my blindness; it was the influence of your presence that restored me to my faith in womankind."

Lyra, motionless and pale, looked at him with sad, wondering eyes.

"I can not tell you when the charm began to work in me. I only know that soon I felt as a man feels who fears to leave the rock upon which he has climbed out of the deadly clutches of the sea. I felt that if I left you, if I removed myself from your influence, I should sink back into the life of hate and distrust which was worse than death."

Lyra stirred with a troubled sense of awe.

"You were unconscious of all this; I know that; I have known it all the time. I myself for a long while did not dis-

cover that I had learned to get back my trust in woman because I had learned to love you."

Lyra uttered a faint cry.

"You do not shrink from me?" he said. "That is right; you have no need to. I loved you, I love you still, I shall love you till I die; but it is with a love of which I am not ashamed, for it has never for one instant bred an unworthy thought of you. What is it the man in the play says? 'As some saint niched in cathedral aisle.' Yes, that is it, Lady Dane; you were just a saint to me; something sweeter and holier than a sister. I would have laid down my life for you, and I would as willingly have died for Dane, your husband."

His dark eyes shone with the fervor which might have beamed from the eyes of the purest of King Arthur's knights. She did not shrink, but an infinite pity welled up in her heart, and the tears came into her eyes. She had shed none for herself.

"I would tell you all this if Dane were sitting beside us," he went on in a low voice that thrilled her by its earnestness. "I think, sometimes, that he must have seen into my heart and known how it was with me. Lady Dane, my happiness is only to be found by your and Dane's side. I said to myself—ah, and how often have I held self-communion on the subject!—that if you would accept my friendship, if you would let me see you, share, as a spectator only, in your happiness, I should be well content to let the dead past bury its dead, and live only for you and him. I thought"—his voice grew very low and solemn—"that in the coming time there would be others—your children, little ones having the look of your eyes, the trick of your voice—whom I could love, and whose love I could win in return. And I have said to my tempest-tossed soul: 'Wait and be patient; there is a life of love, pure love, unstained by passion, before you. Be content to be her friend, *their* friend, knowing that your love has won a corner of their hearts for you.'"

The tears were running down Lyra's face. She put up her veil with a trembling hand, then extended the hand to him. She could not speak.

He took the hand, held it for a moment, and did not press it to his lips before he laid it in her lap.

"Oh, I am not worthy—not worthy!" she faltered, brokenly.

"Not worthy!" He smiled. "To me you have always been the best, the purest-hearted woman in all the world. You are still—"

“No, no! not now!”

“Yes, *now*,” he said, almost fiercely. “Do you think that I suspect you of evil? You! I would as soon suspect one of the angels in heaven! I find you here alone, flying from your home; but I know that the trouble is not of your causing; I know that you have been sinned against, not sinning. I have looked into your eyes, and they are still pure and untainted.”

He clinched his hand.

“I know the other look; I have seen it too often; I remember it as it shone in the eyes of my false wife. No, Lady Dane; others might think ill of you, but my love for you gives me the power of reading you as I read this paper. I should believe in you though all the world were against you. And now will you not trust me, confide in me?”

“I can not,” she said once more. “You must leave me, Lord St. Aubyn. We must part never to meet again.”

“Pardon me!” he cried. “I should be loath to desert any woman in her hour of need; I am not likely to leave you. Wherever you are going, I will take you there safely. What do you think Dane would say to me if I were to desert you, leave you, alone and unprotected?”

She wrung her hands.

“There is only one place I can go,” she said. “The man said this train went to Barnstaple—”

She stopped, as if she did not wish to tell him any more.

“Very well,” he said; “we will go to Barnstaple. You have friends there? We will find them. Now, will you not try and get some sleep?” he added, gently. “I will not talk to you; indeed, I will leave you at the next station and have the carriage locked and reserved for you.”

She tried to thank him, and closed her eyes. It was evident to him she was very near physical and mental exhaustion.

He went to the further corner and looked out of the window. What he should do he did not know. At any rate, he would not leave her—could not.

When the train drew up at the next station he got out quietly—for he thought she was asleep—and went for the guard, found him, and was coming back to the carriage to have it locked, when a woman opened the door and got in.

Lord St. Aubyn touched her arm.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To Barnstaple, sir,” she replied. “Isn’t this right?”

“Quite right,” said St. Aubyn. “You won’t mind having the door locked and the carriage reserved?”



He got into the next compartment and lighted his pipe. thankful that Lyra had a woman to keep her company.

The train moved on slowly. Lyra still lay in a kind of half stupor for some minutes, then she awakened and sat up and put her veil back. As she did so the woman on the opposite seat looked at her, then gave a cry of astonishment and pleasure.

"Miss Lyra! Is it you, Miss Lyra—oh! I beg your pardon; I mean, your ladyship?"

Lyra stared at her wearily, then gasped, "Mary!" and clutching her arm, clung to her old servant.

Mary was speechless with surprised delight for a moment, then she broke out into an exclamation:

"Lor', miss!—I mean, my lady—I can't scarcely b'lieve my eyes! I feel quite 'mazed! To think as it should be you a-sitting there, and I not know it! But it was the veil and this plaguey light, and I was in such a stew a-thinking that perhaps I'd got into the wrong train, after all, and the door locked! But"—she broke off, looking hard and anxiously at Lyra's white, worn face—"is—is anything the matter, miss—I mean, my lady? Dear, dear! it's so hard to remember that you're married and a great lady! Are you ill, Miss Lyra? Is—is"—she looked at the dark dress—"is any one dead?"

"No," said Lyra, trying to retain her composure, but trembling; "no one is dead, and—and I am not ill; but I am in great trouble, Mary."

"Trouble, miss? Oh, I'm so sorry! And where are you going, and all alone? But you're not alone now, Miss Lyra, thank goodness! Lor'! to think that I should meet you in a train, and that I've only been on the railroad once before in all my life, and wouldn't be now but that my old grandmother was ill and sent for me! She keeps a shop at the place where I got in, and is very well off, and so"—ingenuously—"I felt bound to go. Not that I covet her money, or am one to wait for dead men's shoes—or women's, either. But, Lor'! how I do run on, and you in trouble and waiting to tell me all about it! Don't mind me, Miss Lyra—I mean, my lady."

Mary's "cackle," as Dane would have called it, had given Lyra time to recover herself.

"I'm afraid I can't tell you about my trouble, Mary," she said. "It is a trouble in which no one can help me, and I must bear it alone as best I can. Tell me about yourself—about Griffith."

"Lor', miss, there's nothing to tell about," said Mary, re-

fraining from asking any more questions with that true delicacy which persons of her class so often display. "And as to Griffith, he's just the same as ever. He be a-gettin' on nicely, and have got quite a little farm at the Mill Cottage. I go over there very often when it's my Sunday out, and we always spend the time talking of you. He shows me your letters, and gets me to read 'em to him every time, as if he'd never heard 'em before; and he's as proud of 'em as if they were writ on gold. Lor', how pleased he'll be to see you, Miss Lyra! There'll be no holding him."

Lyra was on the point of saying that she was not going to the cottage, but she paused. Why should she not go there, for a few hours, at any rate? Where else could she go? She would be safe there, and could rest and recover strength enough to enable her to continue her journey to London.

"He'll be a'most mazed"—("mazed" is the Devonshire for "mad," "excited.") "He's always hoping that you might find time to come and see him, if it was only for a few minutes. He's just the same as ever, miss—I mean, my lady—as crusty as an old file and as rough as a bear; but it's only outside, miss; his heart's all right, is Griffith's, and it's always 'My Miss Lyra, bless her!' with him. We often talk of old times, as is only natural. Ah, dear! we was all so happy, wasn't we, miss! Do you mind that Mr. Geoffrey Barle?"

Lyra drew away from her and averted her face.

"Terrible end for him, wasn't it, miss? Griffith told all about it. But, there; I mustn't keep on gabbling, for you look tired and well-nigh worn out. Let me put this shawl round you, for it's got chilly. Now, do'ee, miss; I'm only a-carrying it."

When St. Aubyn got out at the next station, he was surprised to find Lyra lying down wrapped in the shawl, and the strange woman sitting beside her and holding her hand.

"You know this lady?" he asked in a whisper.

"Lor' bless you, yes, sir!" said Mary in a low, excited voice. "It's Miss Lyra, my old mistress. She's asleep, sir, thank goodness! for she looks main ill and troubled, poor thing!"

"Where are you going?" asked St. Aubyn.

"To the Mill Cottage, her old home," said Mary, promptly. "I'm going to take her there, and stay with her, if I lose my situation;" and she set her lips firmly.

St. Aubyn murmured an inaudible thanksgiving.

"Yes, yes," he said; "that's right. I will find you a new situation, if you should lose your present one. Lady Armitage

is in need of you. Where is this Mill Cottage?" he asked, quickly, for the guard was impatient.

"Where? In the Taw valley. Barnstaple's the address. Don't you be afraid, sir," she added, as St. Aubyn glanced anxiously at Lyra, "I'll take care of her. I'm not a-going to leave her, now I've found her—and her wanting me too."

"Yes, yes," said St. Aubyn, eagerly; "she does want you."

At the next station he managed to get two cups of tea, and brought them to the carriage. Lyra was still asleep, or in the stupor of exhaustion, and he waited beside the carriage window until the very last moment.

They reached Barnstaple in the early morning. The storm had passed, the sun was shining brightly. He went to the carriage, and told Mary to remain where she was until he came for them; then he hurried to the telegraph office, got a form, and wrote:

"Come to me at once—the Mill Cottage.

"ST. AUBYN."

He addressed this "Armitage, Highfield," and was carrying it to the boy at the pigeon-hole, when it occurred to him that he would send it as if it had come from Lyra.

He erased the "St. Aubyn," and wrote "Lyra" in its place.

"Send this off at once. How long will it take getting there?"

"Not long, sir. The line's clear in the morning," said the boy.

St. Aubyn engaged a fly, and then ran back to the carriage where Lyra and Mary were waiting for him.

He took Lyra's hand, then held her arm as she alighted, for she appeared almost too weak to stand.

Without a word she allowed him to lead her to the fly, and in silence they made their way through the town to the Taw valley, Lyra leaning back and holding Mary's hand, and looking straight before her with eyes that seemed to see nothing.

But when the fly rattled down the rough, uneven road to the cottage, and the house came in sight, she uttered a faint cry, and her hand convulsively clutched Mary's.

At the sound of carriage wheels Griffith came out of the porch and staggered down the path. At sight of Lyra, his rugged face worked convulsively, and his fierce eyes gleamed and blinked.

"Miss Lyra!" he gasped. "Miss Lyra!"

Lyra stood up in the fly and held out her hand to him.



"Griffith!" she cried. "Griffith!"

He took her in his arms, as he had been wont to do when she was a mite of a child, and lifted her bodily from the carriage, and held her as if in defiance of the whole world.

"You've come back to me, Miss Lyrall!" he murmured, hoarsely. "You've come back at last!" and completely disregarding the others, he carried her into the cottage.

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## CHAPTER XL.

DANE drove like Jehu. When he reached Castle Towers the horses were wet with sweat and flecked with foam, but otherwise none the worse for their sharp spin. The vague suspicion and dread which Chandos's hint and insinuation had raised in Dane's mind had been scattered by the cool night wind through which he had rushed.

There was still a dim light burning in the hall, and at the sound of the carriage, the butler came to the door.

He did not recognize Dane for a moment, and started and stared when he did so.

"Oh, my lord, is anything the matter?" he inquired.

"No, no!" said Dane; "that is, nothing to be alarmed about." He was just going to ask if Lady Dane was there, but checked himself. "You are up late," he said. "Don't trouble to ring for a groom; I'll take the horses round to the stable."

"Certainly not, my lord; the groom will be round in a few minutes. I'm very glad I'm up. I was waiting for the master. Come in, my lord; I'll stand by the horses."

"They won't run away to-night, poor beasts," he said, grimly. "I've come quickly. Mr. Fanshawe is out, you say?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the butler, as he patted the horses and looked with some surprise at their spent condition. "He has been called out to see a sick man."

"How is Lady Theodosia?" asked Dane, fighting hard to keep the question "Where is Lady Dane?" from his lips.

"Thank you, my lord; her ladyship is better, but her ankle is very painful, and her ladyship can't get any sleep at night. I'm afraid she's awake now;" and he glanced up at the lighted window of Lady Theodosia's room.

A groom came up and took the horses, and Dane went into the hall. As he did so, Mrs. Leslie looked over the balustrade.

"Is that you, Martin? How is he? Why, Lord Dane"—she broke off, starting at sight of him—"is it you? Oh,

there is something the matter!" and she was down the stairs and at his side in a moment. "What is it? Lyra?"

His face grew pale again.

"Lyra is here, is she not?" he said, gripping her hand fiercely.

"Lyra—Lady Dane—here?" she faltered, with amazement. "No! Oh, Lord Dane, why did you think that? Where is she?"

He drew her into a room and closed the door.

"Are you sure she is not here? You are not deceiving me?"

"Deceiving you, Lord Dane? No, no; we have not seen her; she is not here. Why should I or any one else deceive you?"

"God knows!" he said, bitterly. "Read that!" and he thrust the crumpled note into her hand.

Mrs. Leslie read it, and stared from it to him with surprise and dismay.

"I—I don't understand!" she gasped.

"No, nor I. Who does understand it? Is there any one who can explain it to me?" he demanded, wildly. "Why has she gone—left me—who—who loved her so, and where has she gone? Does Dosie know? Can she tell me? *Will* she tell me? I'm stifling and choking with this mystery and suspense!"

"Oh, be calm, Lord Dane," she implored, "and let me think! No, Dosie does not know. She has had no letters save those I have seen; and only an hour ago she was wondering whether you and Lyra would come here. Dosie is incapable of concealment or deceit; but I need not tell you that."

"Then who does know?" he said, fiercely. "Some one must be able to explain that—that note. Give it to me!" and he almost snatched it from her hand and began pacing the room. "My God! what shall I do? where can I seek her?" he groaned.

Mrs. Leslie put her hand to her head.

"It is all dark to me," she said. "Oh, if I had only stayed with her! I will go and tell Dosie."

"No, no!" he said; "she is ill; it can do no good." Then, forgetting what the butler had said, he inquired, as if by a sudden impulse: "Where is Martin?"

Mrs. Leslie gave a little gasp as of relief.

"Ah, yes, Martin!" she said. "Yes, he can help us; he can tell us what to do. He is always so calm and self-reliant and helpful."

"Where is he?" demanded Dane, hoarsely.

"He has gone down to the village to see a man who is ill. He is at the cottage where Dosie slipped down the stairs and sprained her ankle. The poor fellow is a stranger in the place, and very ill indeed—dying, the doctor says. Martin was sent for an hour ago, and I don't know how long he may stay—all night, perhaps. Martin never spares himself. Shall I send for him? I must."

"No, no," said Dane; "tell me where the place is, and I will go to him. I will not detain him more than five minutes; that will be long enough to tell me that he can't help me;" and he groaned.

"Oh, don't despair, Lord Dane!" she implored him, with tears in her eyes. "It will all come right."

"Don't talk like that, or you will drive me mad!" he said, hoarsely. "I can see my darling at this moment in all sorts of dangers and perils—alone, friendless—"

Mrs. Leslie ran and got him a glass of wine.

"Oh, drink it to please me!" she said. "You must not break down—be strong, for *her* sake, Lord Dane."

He gulped down the wine.

"Now, tell me where this cottage is," he said, putting on his hat.

She told him.

"You can not mistake it; it is the third cottage on this side of the church. You will see a light in the bedroom window. You will come back?"

"I can't tell," he said.

As he went out he told the groom to have the horses fed, rubbed down, and harnessed.

"I may want them again in an hour," he said.

It was a lovely night. The stars were shining down upon the sleeping village; all was peace—a peace which jarred like a discordant note upon Dane's tortured heart.

He had no difficulty in finding the cottage; the light in the sick-room guided him. He found the door open—as, indeed, were most of the doors in that happy and honest little place—and he went in and knocked softly against the panel.

Martin Fanshawe came to the head of the stairs.

"Dane!" he said, in a hushed voice, but with his usual calmness. "What is wrong? Come up, will you?"

Dane went up and followed him into the small room. The candle-light fell upon a man lying on the bed. At a glance Dane saw that he was dying.

"You can speak before him," said Martin; "the poor fel-



low is unconscious. I can not leave, for I have sent the woman of the house for the doctor, and I am taking charge of him. Is it anything serious?"

Before this, the greatest of all troubles, Dane felt his own shrink and dwindle.

"It is Lyra," he said. "She has gone!"

In a few broken words he told his story. Martin looked grave and troubled, but calm and self-possessed. How many terrible stories of sorrow and sin he had to listen to and advise upon!

"Sit down," he said, and he gently pressed Dane's shoulder. "Let me think. You have no clew, you say?"

"None," said Dane, in a hoarse undertone. Both men spoke in a whisper for fear of disturbing the dying man.

"Is there no one of whom you can think to whom she would naturally go? Consider, and be calm. I know what you are feeling. I sympathize with you fully. Lyra is dear to all of us—to me, to Dosie. We must keep our heads cool, Dane. We can do nothing, absolutely nothing, until the telegraph opens at eight o'clock. Be sure of this, that your wife—our dear Lyra—is in God's hands. They are stronger than ours, strong to protect and guard her."

At these kind, wise words, poor Dane nearly broke down, as he pressed the hand Martin held out to him. Martin went to the bed and bathed the forehead of the dying man, and was then returning to Dane's side, when the man spoke.

"Send—send for him! Tell him I have something to tell him—something I must tell him!" he said, feebly.

Martin went back to the bed and took the man's hand.

"If you mean me, Martin Fanshawe, I am here," he said.

The man opened his eyes—already dimmed by the death film—and looked up at him with piteous imploration.

"I—I knew you would come if they sent," he said.

"You have been very kind to me—you and Lady Theodosia, God bless her! Fanshawe, I—I have something on my mind. It weighs heavily upon me. I feel as—as if it was keeping me from dying, and God knows I want to die and be at rest badly enough. How hot it is! Hell's hot, they say!"

"Hush, hush!" said Martin Fanshawe; "there is no hell for the repentant sinner, my friend. If you have anything to tell me, any sin which you repent, and which you wish to confess, tell me."

He glanced at Dane, who rose to leave the room.

"Who is that?" asked the dying man.

"A friend of mine," said Martin. "He, too, is in sore

trouble. He will leave us that you may speak without reserve."

"No, no," said the man. "Let him stay. What I've to tell you is best told with a witness. It does not concern myself alone. Let him come nearer and—and—listen. Take down every word I utter. Give me that Bible you left for me."

Martin reached the Bible from the drawers beside the bed and placed it in the man's hand. He grasped it, and slowly lifted it to his lips.

"You—you are a magistrate, are you not?" he asked, in a hollow voice.

"I am," said Martin Fanshawe; "so also is my friend."

"Good!" he said, with evident satisfaction in his thin tones. "I want to tell you about a piece of villainy in which I was concerned. A man I know—an old college chum—came to me and asked me to take part in some amateur theatricals."

His voice failed him, but he fought against his weakness then, and until the end of his confession, with a stubborn persistence which seemed to thrust death aside by sheer force of will.

"That is what he called it, but I saw that it was something more serious than play-acting. He knew all about my past history, and that I'd meant to go into the Church, and he wanted me to play the part of a parson at a wedding. Take that down."

Martin wrote rapidly in his note-book.

"I have it," he said, in a low voice.

"Every word? Good. I was hard up, stone-broke, at the time, up to my neck in debt, and altogether helpless. I drank too. He gave me enough liquor to drown what little conscience was left to me, and I consented to do what he required of me, on condition of a lump sum down and my passage paid to one of the colonies. He was a plausible devil, and held out hopes"—he broke off and laughed—a ghastly laugh of self-mockery—"as if reformation was possible to such as I am! I consented, and left all the arrangements to him. He was to bring the girl to an old church on a certain day, and there I was to marry them—or to pretend to marry them."

He stopped, and labored for breath.

"Give—give me some water."

Dane held a cup to the parched lips, and the man thanked him.

"The day came, and though I'd more than half resolved to break my promise and have nothing to do with it, the money and the hope of a fresh chance in life were too much for me,

and I—I went. It was an old church.” He shuddered. “I can feel the damp of the place in my bones at this moment. My friend appeared with the girl. I’d expected to see some servant or farmer’s daughter, but the moment I saw her I knew that she was a lady. She was”—he groaned—“she was very beautiful, but it wasn’t only her beauty. It was something else in her face that went to my heart, and made me feel like a devil in the bottomless pit. I could see that she was innocent—innocent as a child—though the man had tried to make her out a willing party in the sham. I could see that she believed the marriage was all right and correct, and that—that the man who had bribed me to destroy her was true and honest. More water!” he panted. “My blood’s on fire at the thought of it all!”

Dane held the cup to his lips again.

“I’d have backed out then—before God, I wanted to do so, I tried to do so, but the devil in human shape, who had got me in his grip, taunted and goaded me on. I—I went through the farce of marrying them!”

His lip twitched, and he groaned heavily.

“Raise him,” said Martin, in a low, solemn voice.

Dane put his arm round the man and raised him.

“If I had lived to be a hundred, instead of dying in my prime, I should have remembered her face as she stood in the old church. She was pale and—and—she tried to smile—” He stopped and moaned. “My friend gave me the money, and I went out—like Judas. I wish I had hanged myself, like him! I left them, left her to fate, like the cur and devil I was, and that same day sailed for Australia.”

Martin wrote rapidly.

“I have it all down,” he said. “Is there anything more—the names?”

The dying man nodded feebly.

“Yes. I went to Australia and—and I tried to turn over a new leaf. I think I—I should have done well and succeeded. I—I was no fool, and—and there is a chance over there for any man with brains who is willing to use them, and not afraid of work, but”—he sighed painfully—“I couldn’t forget. Her face haunted me. I saw it every night when I fell asleep. I carried it about with me all day. In the middle of my work it would come between me and whatever I was doing, and—and—I took to drink again to drown her face, the memory of the wrong I’d done her. Look here!—you’re a parson. Next Sunday, when you’re preaching, tell them that if they think sin isn’t punished in this world, they make a great mistake.



It is. The worst man in the world has a conscience, and it will make a hell for him if he's done one half as bad a deed as I did that day."

Martin Fanshawe sighed.

"Would that all sinners could hear you!" he murmured.

"I left Australia. I didn't seem able to stay in any place long. I wandered about, working sometimes, drinking always. I lived the life of a dog; worse, the life of a man haunted by remorse. One day—I was in Rome—I got into the hands of the police. I forget what was the matter. Drink, I dare say—I forget. They were dragging me off to the station. There was a crowd. On the edge of it I saw"—he paused and struggled for breath—"I saw *her*. For a moment or two I thought I had got D. T., and that it was only an hallucination. Then she spoke, and I knew it was she, the girl with the beautiful, innocent face, that I'd pretended to marry. And she pleaded for me, she, the girl I'd ruined! There was a man with her—I don't now who he was—her husband, perhaps—but he paid some money—I think it was my rent I was in trouble for—and I was free. She—she I'd sinned against, she I'd betrayed with the hands of a devil in human form—had saved me! Give me some water—water!" he broke off, gasping.

Dane put the cup to his lips once more, and the dying man tried to drink, but in vain.

"I'm—I'm nearly played out!" he panted, almost inaudibly. "There's no more to tell. I tried to drink myself dead. They—they turned me out of Rome. I—I came to England, and—and fell ill here. I—I knew I was dying; I told your wife so. I'm glad of it! What does such a wretch as I am want with life? If I lived to be a hundred, as I said, I should always be haunted by her. Yes, I'm glad I'm dying! Have—have you taken down all I've told you?" he demanded, in a hollow whisper.

Martin inclined his head.

"Yes," he said. "But your confession is incomplete; you have given us no names, no dates. I trust—I greatly trust that the wrong you did may be set right. God works in a mysterious way. He has sent you here—has sent us here to receive this confession of yours. There is—there must be some Divine purpose in it. Tell us the name of the man who tempted you—the name of the unfortunate girl whom you deceived."

Rawdon raised his hand to his lips.

"My name is Rawdon—Robert Rawdon," he said, in so low

a voice that Martin and Dane had to bend down to catch it. "The man who persuaded me to—to play the part in the mock-marriage was— Water! Oh, God, I am dying!"

Dane bathed his face, and Martin got a few drops of brandy through the fast-clinching lips. Rawdon made a fierce fight with death, and for a few minutes conquered.

"The man was Chandos—Chandos Armitage. Take it down—I swear it! The old church—St. Mark's—Barnstaple. In—in the valley—near the river—"

Dane started, but still held the dying man in his arms.

Martin wrote word for word.

"The girl?" he said, solemnly.

"The girl?" It was evident that Rawdon was battling with the shadow of death that threatened to obliterate his memory as well as his power of speech. "The girl? She pleaded for me; she—she saved me that day in Rome—and I had ruined her! Oh, God, forgive me!"

"Her name?" said Martin, solemnly.

"Her name?" panted Rawdon. "I—I forget it. It is all dark, dark!"

His voice ceased. The two men beside the bed exchanged glances.

"It is too late," said Martin, gravely.

But, as if he had heard the words and understood them, the dying man opened his eyes, and almost inaudibly breathed:

"Lyra Chester!"

For a moment Dane did not realize all the name meant; then he uttered a cry—a cry of horror.

The dying man heard it and turned his eyes upon him.

"Lyra Chester," he repeated. "I—I ruined her, and—and she pleaded for me! Tell her that—that ever since that day—I'd have given my life to undo—"

His voice failed, a shudder convulsed his worn frame, and he sunk into Dane's arms.

Martin Fanshawe knelt beside the bed, and his deep voice broke the stillness of death with the Lord's prayer:

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

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## CHAPTER XLI.

DANE's face, as he looked at Martin Fanshawe, was almost as white as the dead man's. Without a word, he staggered down-stairs into the open air.

Martin followed him, after a few minutes, the woman of the house having returned, and took his arm.

"Dane, Dane!" he said, as Dane tried to shake him off. "My poor Dane! You mustn't give way; you must keep calm. I wish that I could say that I did not think what we have just heard was true."

"It is true enough!" broke in Dane, hoarsely. "It is true enough. Oh, my God! Married! She is not my wife! And married to—Chandos!" He leaned against the fence and bowed his head in his hands, as if completely crushed. A moment or two afterward he looked up. "I don't believe it! I won't believe it! No one but a fiend could have been as false and treacherous as that man says she was. Lyra, my Lyra, false! she is incapable of it! Martin"—with a wild appeal in his voice—"you know her—do you think that Lyra, *my wife*, could have acted as he says she has done?"

Martin Fanshawe was silent for a moment; then he said, solemnly:

"No! No, Dane! I think that poor fellow who has just gone to the Judgment seat told the truth as far as he knew it; but I feel convinced that there must be something behind it all, that we are not in possession of all the facts. I feel with you, that Lyra is incapable, simply incapable of such—such deceit as this poor fellow's story implied. Come home now, Dane." And he led him away.

"Don't—don't tell the women!" Dane groaned, as they entered the house. "I couldn't bear to have them speak to me—yet, though they and all the world will hear it presently. Not but that it's true, mind!" he added, glaring fiercely at Martin.

"There's—there's some explanation awaiting us. I am convinced of that. The first thing we have to do is to find her."

"Yes," said Dane, with a groan; "and him"—he added, between his clinched teeth; "let me go at once—but where?"

"Back to Highfield, first," said Martin, quietly. "She may have sent some message, and it may be awaiting you now." Dane shook his head despondently. "Give me five minutes, and I will be ready to go with you," continued Martin.

"I can't take you from home," said Dane, wistfully.

Martin Fanshawe smiled gravely as he left the room.

"Dosie is used to my leaving her at the call of any one who needs me; and you have a greater claim than any one, Dane."



The two men drove back to Highfield. Dane had resigned the reins to Martin.

"You take them," he said. "My—my hands shake so."

As they came in sight of the house he looked up at the window of Lyra's room and sighed heavily, and turned his head away.

"I shall never see her again!" he groaned.

"I think you will," responded Martin, in a quiet tone of conviction. "Wait till we hear the whole truth. I can not believe her guilty."

"Guilty? No!" said Dane. "But that devil may have got her in his power."

Martin insisted upon his taking some breakfast, though it were only a cup of coffee and a slice of bread, and then the two men went down to the inn. Dane took a heavy riding-whip from the stand as they crossed the hall, but Martin drew it from his hand.

"No," he said; "the law is stronger to punish than the individual. Leave him to the law, Dane!"

"You had better let me go alone, for I shall kill him," Dane said, grimly.

They went to the inn, and Martin Fanshawe, gently putting Dane back, inquired of the obsequious landlord for Mr. Chandos Armitage.

"Mr. Armitage have gone, sir," he said, looking from one to the other. "A telegram came for him quite early this morning—a few minutes after eight—and Mr. Armitage started directly. He's gone by the first train, my lord."

Dane turned away and ground his teeth.

"Did he say where he was going?" asked Martin.

"No, sir. He was in such a hurry that he didn't even pay his bill. Not that that matters, for I knew as he was Lord Dane's cousin. He seemed upset like, and went off all in a flurry. I expect there was some bad news in that there telegram, sir."

Martin took Dane's arm, and they went rapidly to the post-office.

"Is there any letter or telegram for Lord Dane?" Martin inquired of the girl at the counter.

"Yes, sir; here are the letters," she said, handing them to him.

Dane examined them with feverish eagerness, but there was none from Lyra.

"There was a telegram, but you've had that, I suppose, my lord. I sent it the very moment it came, just after eight."

"No," said Dane.

She flushed, and looked alarmed at his white, haggard face.

"I sent it directly," she murmured. "Johnny, didn't you take the telegram to Highfield?" she asked of a lad who came in at the moment.

"Naw," he said, stolidly. "I met the gentleman in the village, just outside the inn, and he looked at it, and said it was for him, an' he took it, he did."

Dane breathed hard. Martin pressed his arm warningly.

"Just repeat the telegram," he said; "Lord Dane has not seen it yet; there has been some mistake."

The girl wrote out the telegram, and Dane almost snatched it from her, and drew Martin outside.

"It is from her," he said. "Look!"

Martin took out his watch.

"There is no train for two hours," he said. "You know the place where she has gone?"

"Know it! Yes, yes!" said Dane. "I ought to have known that she would go there. Thank God! But this villain, he has got the start of me. He will frighten her into accompanying him—will carry her off."

Martin shook his head.

"I think not," he said, quietly. "He is a clever scoundrel, and up to every dodge. This interception of the telegram was a cunning stroke; but Lyra is not the woman to be driven into going with him. You see, she sends for you. You must wire back at once."

Dane wrote the answering message, his hand steady enough now.

"Am coming. Fear nothing.

DANE."

"Can't I set the police on that scoundrel's track?" Dane asked Martin.

But Martin Fanshawe shook his head.

"Not yet," he said. "Let us wait until we get to Lyra and hear the whole truth. We must be patient and wary. Remember that we have to do with a villain who is astute and full of cunning. Where is St. Aubyn? He might help us."

"God knows," said Dane. "Chandos said that he had seen him go off by the train, and hinted that he had gone with her."

"Ah! if he only had done so. But I am afraid that supposition is only too good to be true," said Martin Fanshawe.

"But no matter. If St. Aubyn should come back, we

could employ him in tracking Chandos. We must keep the police out of this as long as possible—for good, if we can.”

Dane looked at him in agony.

“Yes, yes! Why—why didn’t she tell me? Why didn’t she confide in me? My God, Martin, I can not, I *dare* not doubt her or I shall go mad; but if she was in ignorance that her marriage was a mock one, she must have thought she was committing bigamy, and—and if she knew it was false, why did she not tell me?”

“I can’t answer,” said Martin, gravely; “but,” he said, firmly, “I will answer for Lyra’s truth and honor.”

Thus they talked, Dane one moment half mad with doubt, the next casting the doubt from him fiercely, until the train started.

At the station Martin inquired of the station-master if a man answering to Chandos’s description had traveled by the early train.

“Oh! yes, sir. Went off by the 8:38,” was the reply.

Now, for a wonder, Martin and Dane had done the Honorable Mr. Chandos an injustice. His interception of the telegram had been quite innocent. He thought it was intended for him.

That Lyra should send to him to come to her had surprised and startled him, but it never occurred to him that the telegram was intended for Dane.

“Why should she wire to him—Chandos?” he asked himself. “And why had she gone to the Mill Cottage? Had she and St. Aubyn quarreled already, or—had she already been smitten by remorse and fled from him, as she had fled from Dane?”

He thought that the latter supposition was the more likely of the two. Yes, that was it. She had suddenly realized what she was doing, and had sent St. Aubyn about his business, and taken refuge in her old home.

But why had she sent for him? Now, Mr. Chandos was as vain as a peacock, and he actually permitted himself to labor under the delusion that Lyra wanted him.

“After all, she thinks I’m her husband,” he said to himself; “and having no one else to whom she can turn, she naturally seeks my protection.”

But should he go? As he asked himself the question, he remembered the last hour he had spent at the cottage, and Griffith’s furious pursuit, and suddenly he decided that he certainly would not go, but after some consideration he changed his mind. After all, it was extremely improbable that the



man should be still at the cottage—next door to impossible, in fact.

He would chance it and go. He must persuade Lyra to leave England and hide herself. Perhaps he could induce her to go with him. The thought brought an evil smile to his face, which rose again and again during the course of the long journey. He had always hated Dane. What a delicious stroke of malice it would be if he could persuade Lyra to run away with him, Chandos!

By the foregoing it will be seen that Mr. Chandos's drinking habits had somewhat dulled the acuteness of his brain. If he had not been sodden by drink and morbid vanity he would not have misread her so monstrously, or have smiled so complacently as he lay at full length in the railway carriage and smoked his delicately scented cigarette.

## CHAPTER XLII.

LYRA was worn out, and suffered Mary to undress her and put her to bed without a protest. Now that she was under the old roof, a strange feeling of peace and security fell upon her wounded spirit.

"If she could only fall asleep never to wake again!" she thought, with a sigh, as she closed her burning eyes.

Griffith asked no questions of either St. Aubyn or Mary, but after the bedroom door was closed upon Lyra he had gone down to the garden and resumed his work in grim and dogged silence.

That something had happened—some great trouble had befallen her—he guessed, but he was almost indifferent as to its nature. It was enough for him that "his little girl" had come back to him, and as he worked, he told himself that she should never be withdrawn from his care again.

St. Aubyn, afraid to utter a word lest it might compromise Lyra, maintained a profound silence respecting her. It was evident that Griffith regarded him as a friend, for when St. Aubyn addressed a few words to him on ordinary topics, Griffith answered him civilly.

"I suppose I can't get a room nearer than Barnstaple?" he asked. "I should like to remain"—he was going to say, "near Lady Armitage," but checked himself—"for a day or two."

"No," said Griffith. "You can get a room there."

St. Aubyn said no more to him, but waited till Mary came down.

"How is Lady Armitage?" he asked. "Shall I get a doctor? Is there anything I can do?"

"No, sir," said Mary, after a moment's thought. "I don't think she's ill—not ill in a way that a doctor could do any good. She's in trouble, I can see. But a doctor couldn't mend that, could he, sir? She's asleep now, bless her!"

St. Aubyn shook his head.

"I trust that her trouble will soon be over," he said.

He dared not say that he had wired for her husband, lest Dane should not come. He was so completely in the dark that he was afraid to move in any direction.

"Please tell Lady Armitage that I am going to remain here, near her, until—well, for the present," he said, "and that I will see her whenever she wishes to see me."

Then he went off to Barnstaple and looked up the timetable, and found that if Dane caught either of the two morning trains he would reach the cottage that night.

With a sigh of relief, he went into the town, engaged a room at the hotel, and set himself to the hard task of waiting.

The day passed.

Toward evening Lyra awoke. For the first few moments she thought that she was still in her own room at Highfield; then, as she saw Mary, she remembered, and with a sigh closed her eyes again. She felt incapable of thought, much less of action, and she lay quite still and almost apathetic for some time.

But after awhile the bitterness of her trouble broke over her like a cold wave, and she found it impossible to be still any longer.

"I must get up," she said to Mary. "If—if I lie here thinking, thinking, I shall go mad!"

At first Mary tried to dissuade her, but when she saw that all her coaxing and arguments only distressed and harassed Lyra, she wisely desisted, and helped her to dress.

"It's a lovely night, my lady," she said, drawing aside the curtain. The rain had cleared, and the moon, yellow as gold, shone through a faint warm mist; the tide was coming in slowly, and rippled in silver bars over the sand. As Lyra looked out it seemed to her as if she had never left the cottage, as if her life, since the day her father died, were but a dream.

She turned from the window and sighed. If she could only remain here for the rest of her life? Would they let her? If only they would let her rest in peace! When she went down-stairs the familiar parlor smote her with a pain so keen that she could not endure to sit in the room. The scene

between her and Geoffrey Barle seemed reacting itself before her eyes.

"I will go into the garden, Mary," she said; and she went out and sat in the little arbor, her head leaning against the woodwork, her eyes closed. All was still, save for the lowing of the cows which Griffith was littering for the night in the rough stable he had built behind the cottage, and the soft shriek of the gulls, as they hovered over the incoming tide.

Every now and then Mary came to the door—as she used to do in the old time—but Lyra seemed to be resting so peacefully that Mary judged it best not to disturb her, and returned to the house.

But Lyra, though her eyes were closed, was not asleep. She was thinking of Dane—of Dane, whose heart she had broken—of Dane, whom she would never see again!

Suddenly she heard a sound like that of stealthy footsteps, and thinking it was Griffith, she raised her head and opened her eyes. What should she tell him when he asked her why she had left her husband and come back to the cottage?

The footsteps came nearer, and she heard her name spoken. With a faint cry she attempted to rise, but Chandos pushed himself through a gap in the hedge behind her and laid his hand on her arm.

"Hush!" he whispered, warningly. "Don't make a noise; don't be frightened. I've come, Lyra."

She eyed him with wild horror and dread for a moment, her hand pressed to her bosom; then the color crept into her face, and an expression of contempt and defiance into her eyes.

"You!" she said. "Yes, I might have known that you would break your word; I might have known that I could not trust a liar and a coward!"

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "You sent for me."

Her eyes flashed scorn on him.

"I—sent for *you*!"

"Yes," he said, doggedly; "you telegraphed." He hunted for the telegram, but could not find it. "You sent for me this morning. I left the telegram at the inn, I suppose."

"It is a lie!" she said. "You promised— But I might have known. Why have you come? Is it because you thought I should be alone and helpless?"

"Nonsense!" he said, with a snarl. "You know you sent for me. What is the use of this play-acting? You don't do it at all well, Lyra. Do you think I've come all this way for



the pleasure of wrangling with you? Where is St. Aubyn?" he asked, watching her keenly.

She made no reply. She was weak and ill, and the fictitious strength lent her by her indignation at his presence was fast waning.

"Where is he?" he repeated. "I suppose you've quarreled, or thought better of it and parted from him, eh? Well, perhaps you were right. After all, I'm your proper and legal protector. You can't go back to Dane; that's out of the question. You can't stay here. Why, this is one of the first places he would think of trying. You might have thought of that. If you still want to avoid a scandal, and I suppose you do, you must leave here at once—at once! Do you understand?"

She kept her eyes fixed on him, and clutched the arm of the seat; but she said nothing; did not call for help. His presence filled her with loathing, but not with fear.

He bit his nails and eyed her sideways, watching the effect of his words.

"But, of course, you've thought all this out, or you wouldn't have sent for me. And, after all, it's the proper thing. I dare say you prefer St. Aubyn," he sneered as the hot blood rushed into her face; "there's no accounting for taste; but you were quite right to throw him over. After all, I'm your husband."

Her lips parted and her breath came in quick, sharp pants.

"The best thing you can do is to come with me. We will go abroad, and keep quiet until the fuss has blown over. It won't take very long. Society is accustomed to this kind of thing." The ugly sneer curved his thin lips again. "For his own sake, if not for yours, Dane will hush up the affair. He won't care to move. Yes; you've taken the proper course."

He pulled out his watch.

"There's a London train leaves Barnstaple at 11:25. I'll wait for you at the station and have the tickets ready."

She rose slowly, with the dignity of an outraged woman eloquent in her eyes, her attitude.

"Go!" she said, raising her hand and pointing to the gate. "Utter another word and—"

She had raised her voice unconsciously. Chandos glared round apprehensively, then sprung forward and seized her arm.

"No shouting," he snarled. "You do as I tell you, or it will be bad for you. You are in my power. I've got you, body and soul!"

Lyra shook Chandos Armitage off, with a cry of mingled loathing and dread.

As if in answer to her cry, a rough voice shouted her name. Mr. Chandos started, with an oath, and rushed toward the gate. He had recognized Griffith's voice.

As he reached the gate, Griffith came down the path from the cottage. At sight of Chandos he uttered a cry like that of a wolf-hound at the moment he sights his prey, and dashed after him. Chandos swung the gate to and ran along the rough road; Griffith's appearance had filled him with terror, and for a moment almost deprived him of his senses.

He looked round wildly, and his eye caught sight of the boat dancing on the edge of the river. He made for it with the speed of despair, gained it, and leaping in, pushed it off into the tide.

He had scarcely done so than Griffith reached the spot where the boat had been.

More like a wild animal than a man, he stood on the brink, his gnarled face distorted with rage, his uplifted hands clinching and unclenching.

Chandos sat down, seized the oars, and began to pull furiously. The tide helped him, and in a few minutes he was well out in the river, and, as he thought, out of reach of his pursuer. If he could only gain the opposite shore he was safe. There was something so grotesque in the wildly gesticulating figure of Griffith, helpless and powerless on the edge of the river, that Mr. Chandos could not, even in the midst of his fears, help smiling. His smile grew to a laugh, which reached Griffith.

But before the laugh had died away, the laughter was jerked forward, and the oars were forced from his hands, and the boat was stopped.

It had stranded on the very sand-bank which had caught Lyra the day Dane had swum out to her.

Chandos scrambled to his feet, and seizing one of the oars, attempted to push the boat off; but the harder he pushed, the more frantic his efforts, the harder it seemed to stick. Sometimes he succeeded in getting the bow clear, but then the boat floated round, and the stern stuck. Griffith watched him for a moment, still gesticulating and waving his arms; then he tore off his coat and boots, and running to a point below the sand-bank, plunged into the stream.

Chandos saw this movement, and became still more frantic in his endeavors to float the boat, but the tide and his misguided efforts had lodged it still more firmly in the mud.

Pushing and struggling with the oar, he watched his pursuer swimming rapidly—for the tide was helping Griffith at every inch—toward him. White to the lips, Mr. Chandos gnashed his teeth, and raising the oar above his head, waited. Griffith soon reached the bank. The moon shone on his gnarled face, his fierce, blood-shot eyes.

“Keep off!” shouted Chandos, threateningly. “Keep off or I’ll brain you!”

A hoarse laugh answered him as Griffith swam within a couple of feet of the boat.

Chandos struck wildly and savagely at the distorted face; but with a dexterous dive Griffith avoided the blow, and before Chandos could raise the oar, was on his feet and in the boat.

Chandos stumbled into the bow and raised the oar to strike at him, but with a guttural cry Griffith seized it, flung it in the bottom of the boat, and sprung like a tiger at Chandos’s throat. Chandos went down like a nine-pin, and Griffith, with one knee pressing upon the prostrate man’s chest, dashed the water from his own hair and face, and glared down up him.

“Let me go!” gasped Chandos. “Let me go! Do you mean to murder me? Let me go and I’ll—I’ll pay you well.”

Griffith raised him a little and dashed his head down upon the thwart.

“You’ll—you’ll pay me!” he growled.

Then, still holding him in a grip like a vise, he looked round as if undecided what to do with him.

After a moment—a moment in which the Honorable Chandos lived, say, a thousand years—Griffith lifted him bodily and flung him over the boat’s edge on to the sand-bank.

Then, without a word, he pushed the boat off, seated himself, rested on his oars, and smiled—an awful smile—at his prey.

Chandos lay panting for awhile; then, when he had recovered his breath, he sat up and looked round affrightedly. It occurred to him that his adversary let him off very lightly, and he began to congratulate himself.

He looked at Griffith sitting regarding him with that peculiar smile, and something in the fixed and glowing eyes and the smile itself struck a chill into Chandos’s heart and made him shudder, though why he knew not.

Then he felt something cold touch his feet, and, looking down, understood. It was the water creeping rapidly around him.

With a cry, a shriek, he sprang up and extended his clasped



hands toward those mocking eyes and that slow, vindictive smile.

"Save me!" he shouted. "Save me! Take me off—"

Griffith moved the boat a few yards further away, and went on smiling.

"Take me off, Griffith!" yelled Chandos, hopping about as if he were trying to keep from the insidiously approaching water. "Save me! You won't let me drown! It's murder! murder, do you hear?"

Not for an instant did the fierce eyes remove themselves or the smile relax. Chandos raised his voice and shouted, but the sea-gulls were calling, shrieking all over the river, and as if they were not sufficient to drown his victim's voice, Griffith began to shout and yell a Devonshire chorus loud and hoarse enough to smother the wildest shriek.

Chandos looked from side to side. Not a soul was on the river but themselves, the mist, semi-opaque in the moonlight, hid the banks on either side from view. He was alone and helplessly at the mercy of Griffith. The man would leave him there till the tide rose above the sand-bank and drowned him. It is needless to say Chandos could not swim. He should die in the prime, in the full enjoyment of life, die like a dog within sound, almost within sight, of human aid.

The cold sweat broke out upon his face, his lips grew hot and tremulous, his eyes burned in their sockets, and he fell to trembling as if with ague.

He would have flung himself down upon the sand, but the water had already covered it and was creeping above his ankles.

"Griffith," he cried, hoarsely, "take me off! Save me, and—and I'll give you a hundred pounds—two! Think—think—ah!"—he shrieked as he felt the cold water on his legs above his boots—"think what you could do with two hundred pounds! You'd—you'd be a rich man!"

Griffith put the boat a few yards nearer and laughed at him.

Chandos took to whining.

"Griffith, I—I always liked you! I—I always admired you! So—firm and determined. Ah, yah!"—he danced and hopped grotesquely in his agony, for the tide had reached his knees—"you're—you're not the sort of man to leave a fellow-creature to his de-death!" His teeth chattered, his eyes bulged out. "You're too brave for that!"

Griffith put his boat still nearer, and Chandos, with a gurgling cry, began to wade quickly to it; but as he did so Griffith rowed out of his reach again and smiled.

A cry of despair and rage rose from Chandos's parched lips. "You—you devil!" he shouted; "you mean to murder me! What—what harm did I ever do to you? Help! help!" His voice was hoarser than the gulls' now, and carried no distance. "If it's Lyra you're thinking of, you're only ruining her by killing me! Do you hear?"

Griffith put the boat within hearing distance.

"Say that again!" he growled.

"I do—I do say it, on my oath! You'll never know the truth of this business if—if you leave me to die here like a rat!"

Griffith growled.

"The truth?" he snarled. "You couldn't tell it if you tried! Why shouldn't you die, you rat? She hates you; so do I—drown!"

Chandos flung his arms above his head and howled like a wolf. His face—white and contorted, with the great drops of sweat blotching it, with the distended eyes—was a hideous sight under the calm, placid moonlight; but it seemed only to amuse Griffith.

Chandos looked round with a shudder. The water was nearly breast-high; he had a difficulty in keeping his feet firm on the sand.

"I'll tell you the truth!" he cried, hoarsely. "As I'm a dying man"—Griffith chuckled—"I'll—I'll tell you the truth! You will take me off then—you'll save me if I swear"—he swore an awful oath—"that it's the truth—the *whole* truth?"

As he half yelled, half whined the appeal, Griffith's quick ear caught a sound on the river above them. He put the boat still nearer, but out of the reach of Chandos's hands.

"Be quick, then!" he snarled. "Tell me a lie, as I know to be a lie, and I'll knock you into the water! Go on!"

St. Aubyn literally hung about all day. He could neither eat nor rest. He wished that he had wired to Dane to send an answer; wondered whether he had, indeed, sent an answer to the cottage; tortured himself, in fact, as persons always do in periods of suspense, until the day closed and the time approached when he could, with a fair show of reason, go down to the station to meet Dane.

The train drew up, and Dane and Martin sprung out, and St. Aubyn sprung upon them. Dane's white, haggard face struck him speechless for a moment, and in that moment he

remembered his own agony when he discovered that his wife had left him.

Dane caught him by the arm and fixed him with fiercely interrogating eyes.

"Where is she?" he demanded, hoarsely.

St. Aubyn drew him aside.

"She is all right—she is all right. Be calm, Dane. I tell you she is all right."

Dane leaned against the station wall and wiped his face.

"You—you have been with her?"

"All the time, nearly," said St. Aubyn, his own voice trembling. "I and an old servant of hers, Mary, traveled with her a greater part of the way. She is with her now at the cottage."

Dane drew a long breath of relief.

"Thank God!" he murmured; but his face soon fell again. His darling was safe and sound, but the hideous fact that she had deceived him, married him while she believed herself the wife of another man, still remained.

"You will come to her at once," said St. Aubyn. "I've got a carriage."

But Dane hesitated. Martin touched his arm.

"You must come," he said, in a low voice.

Dane looked from one to the other.

"She will not see me," he muttered, with an air of conviction. "We can never"—his voice choked—"live together again."

St. Aubyn stared at him.

"What hideous mystery is this?" he exclaimed.

Dane turned his head aside.

"Tell him," he said to Martin, and he walked away.

Martin, in as few words as possible, gave the gist of Rawdon's dying confession, and St. Aubyn listened with silent horror until Martin had finished, then he turned upon him.

"That's not all!" he exclaimed; "there is something more to be told. What! do you mean to tell me that he"—he glanced at Dane—"who loves her and knows her, can believe her guilty? There is some devilish juggling still to be discovered. Go to her? Of course he must go to her."

He hailed the carriage and seized Dane's arm.

"Get in," he said, firmly.

Dane, almost prostrated by grief and doubt and despair, obeyed like a child or sick man, and the carriage drove off. He sunk back in his corner, speechless, and the two other men talked in hushed whispers, as if in the presence of death. As



they drove along by the water's edge, St. Aubyn told Martin of the meeting with Lyra, and her finding safe refuge at the cottage, and in a whisper that could not reach Dane, they were working away at the puzzle, when suddenly a wild, unearthly sound came in a weird, ghostly fashion through the moonlit mist.

"What was that?" asked St. Aubyn.

Martin shook his head and turned to Dane. He raised his head and listened listlessly. The cry, mingled with the shriek of the gulls, was repeated.

"Is it the sea-birds?" Martin said.

Dane shook his head apathetically.

"It is some one in distress—out there on the river," he said, with perfect indifference.

A wild howl rose, as if in confirmation of his assertion. Martin sprung to his feet and stopped the flyman, who was driving along half asleep and deaf to everything, then leaped out.

St. Aubyn followed him, and after a moment's hesitation Dane followed also. The two men tried to peer through the mist, but it was like a thin muslin veil, and they could discern nothing; but their strained ears again caught Chandos's yell.

"Some one is in mortal peril—drowning, perhaps," said Martin, gravely. "What is to be done? Is there no boat?"

He ran along the bank, followed by St. Aubyn, and as luck would have it, they saw a boat creeping along shore. An old man was rowing slowly and heavily along, but he did not turn his head in response to their shouts, and St. Aubyn waded into the water and seized the nose of the boat.

The old man turned round with natural astonishment, but shook his head and pointed to his ears when St. Aubyn shouted and asked him if he didn't hear anything.

"He's deaf," said Martin. "Get in—quick! You can row."

"Yes," said St. Aubyn. "But Dane is a far better oarsman. Dane!" he shouted. "Come on, old man!"

Dane, who had followed them leisurely, got into the boat in the same listless way, and took the oars St. Aubyn thrust into his hands.

"I don't hear any cry now," said Martin, gravely. "I'm afraid—"

Then it rose again.

"Row hard, Dane. It is in the middle of the river. Some poor fellow is in trouble," said Martin.

Dane pulled quickly, but with no great enthusiasm; but

suddenly he stopped and looked in the direction of the sand-bank with a strange expression.

This sportsman's ears had recognized Chandos's voice.

Without a word, but with a flash of the eyes, he tore off his coat, and bent to his work as if he were rowing for the 'Varsity race. In a few minutes they were near enough to distinctly hear the voice, the very words, of the distracted wretch.

St. Aubyn sprung up.

"Why—why—that is Chandos Armitage's voice!" he cried.

Dane gave two strokes, then kept the boat still.

"Hush!" he said, hoarsely.

"Row! row!" implored Martin and St. Aubyn in a breath.

He glared at them fiercely, threateningly, and grasping the oars with one hand, held up the other warningly.

Petrified by amazement, they were powerless to act, and could only sit and listen.

It was Chandos's voice, and they could hear every word.

"It's the truth—I swear, I swear it!" he was crying, hoarsely. "She thought it was a real marriage. We parted like strangers directly afterward. She was only my wife in name. I swear it. Mary will tell you—you know yourself—I left her that same afternoon. I never saw her again till she was married to Dane. It—it was only a bit of play-acting. She is not my wife. I admit it, I swear it. She thought I was drowned. She was never my wife. I'll swear it before a magistrate. I confess it all, all, do you hear? Take me off, save me—oh, God, I'm drowning!"

Conflicting emotions expressed themselves like cloud-shadows on Dane's face. His eyes flashed and glittered in the moonlight.

"You—you heard?" he gasped, in a low, dry voice.

"Yes, yes!" cried Martin. "Row more. Give me the oars, he's drowning!"

Dane seemed still lost to the situation for a moment, then he pulled hard. Suddenly they all felt a shock and were thrown into the bottom of the boat. They had run into something. Dane was the first to regain his feet. One oar had slipped from the rowlock, but he seized the other, and, standing on the thwart, looked round.

There, beside them, was Griffith's boat, and Griffith, sitting firm as a rock, and resting on his oars as if nothing were the matter. Dane recognized him after a moment.

"Griffith!" he cried.

Griffith looked at him without a word.

"Where is—where is the man?" shouted Martin.

Griffith looked round the expanse of water and smiled. There was no sign of the wretch who a moment before had been whining out his confession.

"Good God! where is he?" exclaimed St. Aubyn.

"Look there—there!" cried Martin, pointing to a head that had risen a few yards down the stream. "Row, Dane, row! He is drowning!"

Griffith glanced toward the head as if it were absolutely no concern of his, and Dane sat for a moment motionless, then he put the boat's nose for the sinking man and rowed.

The head disappeared, then came up again in a ghostly fashion, but some distance from the boat.

"He will be drowned! We shall be too late!" said Martin.

Dane signed to St. Aubyn to take the oars, and stepping on the gunwale of the boat, dived into the water, saying, as he did so, as calmly as if he were out for a swim:

"Keep the boat down stream!"

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

DANE swam like a fish, as the reader knows, and having learned the trick of the Taw current, he had no difficulty in reaching Chandos. That worthy gentleman was still conscious and mad with terror. At the sight of Dane he at once, as is the custom of your drowning man, made a frantic clutch for him. But this was not the first time Dane had earned the Royal Humane Society's medal for preserving life, and he knew what to expect.

Treading water, he raised his hand and caught Mr. Chandos a smart blow on the head, then seized him by the arm, and, keeping at a safe distance, swam with him to the boat. He had not many yards to go, and very promptly they were both seized by Martin and St. Aubyn and lifted aboard.

Chandos fell at the bottom of the boat; Dane sat on the thwart, breathing hard and wiping the water from his face.

Martin bent over Chandos.

"He is not dead, thank Heaven!" he said, gravely.

"Oh," said St. Aubyn, but with no great joy in his voice, "I don't see that there's much to be thankful for. Here," and he handed his brandy flask to Martin.

Mr. Chandos took a gulp, sat up and looked round, and at sight of Dane set up a howl.

"Save me! save me!" he whined. "I swear that I've



told the truth! Don't let him get at me!" and he clung convulsively to Martin's legs.

Martin, good and charitable as he was, could not help shaking him off.

"Be silent!" he said, almost as sternly as Dane could have spoken. "You have nothing to fear from Lord Dane. He has just saved your life, and if you have a spark of gratitude in you, you will go on your knees and implore his pardon."

But Mr. Chandos was not capable of even a solitary spark of that emotion. He looked under his lids at Dane, and, shivering and shaking, muttered, sullenly:

"Saved my life? He hit me—hit me when I was in the water and helpless! I shall catch my death!"

"It was to save you from gripping him and drowning you both," said Martin. "If you can not bring yourself to thank your preserver, hold your tongue altogether."

Dane rose and beckoned Griffith, who had kept close to them, and viewed the rescue of Chandos with strong disgust. He brought his boat alongside, and Dane stepped into it.

"Row me ashore as quickly as possible," he said.

Griffith eyed him rather suspiciously.

"What for?" he said. "Are you going to worry and plague her? If so—"

"No, no," said Dane, flushing. "I want to go to her and tell her—tell her all that that devil in human form confessed. Be quick, man; I'm on fire. She knows I'm coming. I telegraphed to her."

"No, she doesn't," said Griffith, stolidly; and he took the telegram from his pocket.

"You haven't given it to her!" said Dane.

"No," retorted Griffith, sullenly. "Why should I? She wanted quiet and rest. How did I know what you were coming for? To bring more trouble upon her, perhaps, to make her more unhappy than she is already."

"No, no," said Dane. "It is all cleared up now. Make haste, Griffith. Every moment I'm away from her is an age to me."

Griffith rowed, but none too quickly.

"Why didn't you let him drown—the rat?" he growled.

"What did you interfere for? It was no business of yours."

At any other time Dane would have laughed outright, but he was incapable of a smile just then.

"Row on, or give me the oars," he said, sternly; and Griffith, thus adjured, pulled hard for the shore.

The other boat was pulling up stream toward Barnstaple.

"Don't mind us," shouted St. Aubyn. "We'll take care of him."

"Ugh!" grunted Griffith. "Why don't they chuck him in again? Such as he isn't fit to live. If you'd only have kept away another five minutes!"

Meanwhile, Lyra was in her room, whither she had gone on the flight of Chandos. Her heart was beating wildly, but not with fear. She had, at last, and quite suddenly, come to a sensible decision. She would tell Dane all. She saw that it was useless to hope for secrecy any longer. She would tell him all. And as she sat down at the table, with her writing materials before her, and tried to commence, she realized the folly of flying from him. She ought to have confided in him the moment Chandos appeared on the scene.

"I have been mad!" she moaned. "Yes; I am a coward, and fear drove out all of my senses. Oh, if he were only here, that I might kneel to him, and tell him everything and ask his forgiveness!"

In feverish haste she began her letter.

"Dear Dane," she wrote; then she stopped.

Ought she to address him even in the conventional terms of endearment—she, who had, though unwittingly, wronged and injured him? From henceforth she and he must be strangers, and she must address him as a stranger.

A tear blotted out the words she had written, as if to confirm her decision, and she took a fresh sheet and with dim eyes commenced to write again. Rapidly she set forth the story of Chandos's visit to the cottage, her father's need, which had proved Chandos's opportunity, and the manner in which she had been induced to marry him secretly at the old church. It was a pathetic—a tragic story, told in the simple and moving language of the heart, and she had nearly completed it when she heard a footstep on the stairs—a swift yet firm step, which for the moment sent the blood rushing to her face, for it seemed to her like the one she knew and loved. But it could only be Griffith, she thought, and she quickly hid her letter and rose. As she did so the door opened and Dane sprang toward her and got her in his arms.

She uttered a cry—a cry of joy that found an echo in his heart—and clung to him, sobbing his name convulsively—"Oh, Dane, Dane!" Then, as if the memory of all that had separated them flashed upon her, she drew away from him and held him at arm's-length.

"You—you must not touch me—must not stay!" she panted, with white face and sorrow-laden eyes.

"Not stay?" he said, with something very like a smile, as he pressed her hands to his lips.

"No, no!" she breathed. "You don't know—you don't know, Dane!"

"Do I not?" he said.

"No!" she moaned. "Oh, if I had only told you! I did try—do—do you remember?—but you would not let me; and—and I was a coward and afraid. I"—her voice broke—"I loved you so, Dane; that was why."

He tried to draw her to him again, but she kept him back.

"I would have told you that day you—you asked me to marry you, but you would not listen. Oh, if I had—if I had! Dane, you—you will not be too hard on me! You will remember that I loved you—that I"—the tears streamed from her eyes, and she sunk on her knees at his feet—"that I love you still!"

He tried to raise her, but she would not be raised, and he sunk into a chair, with his arm round her waist, her head resting against his heart.

Her face was turned up to him, and to him, in his joy at recovering her, she had never seemed more lovely, never more worth loving and holding.

"Dane, I have told you all now—now that it is too late. But it has been too late from the beginning. See, I have written it out;" she pointed to the table. "You will take it with you when you go; and you must go now, Dane. I have no right to keep you!" A heart-breaking sigh escaped her lips. "Take it with you, and—and try and forgive me, Dane. I am not so bad as you think me. I thought he was dead. They all—Griffith, everybody—thought that it was he who was drowned!"

"My dearest! my darling—"

"No, no; don't speak to me!" she moaned. "It will rob me of what little strength I have if you—you pity me—and I need all my strength, for—for we must part, Dane!"

She clung to him, the tears coursing down her face.

"We must part. I must never see you again. It would be a sin—and yet, oh, God, I can not bear it—I can not!"

"Lyra, Lyra, my darling, listen to me!" he said, his own eyes filled with tears. "I know all—"

"Ah!" She drew a long breath and gazed up at him apprehensively. "All? And—you forgive me? You can speak to me as you do! Ah, Dane—my husband—"

The word reminded her that, as she thought, she had no right to call him by that sacred name, and with a cry she drew away from him.



He seized her and drew her against his heart.

"Lyra, Lyra!" he said, hoarsely, "I tell you I know all. Both of the villains—the man Rawdon and Chandos—have confessed."

"Confessed!" she breathed, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes, yes. Can not you guess the truth? Think, dearest. What is it that such an unscrupulous scoundrel as Chandos would naturally do?"

She shuddered.

"I don't know what you mean, Dane," she whispered. "I only know that you must not stay here, that—we must part."

His grip on her tightened.

"Part! Who shall part us?"

A look of shame, almost of horror, flashed into her eyes.

"No, no!" she panted. "Save me from myself, Dane. I am weak as water. Save me from myself!"

"My poor child!" he whispered. "There is no need to ask me to save you. You are quite safe, thank God! Do you not understand when I tell you that they have made full and free confession?"

She shook her head. Her hair had escaped its bands, and was falling in a rich flood over her shoulders, and partly hid her face.

He put it back, and looked into her eyes with a look that brought the blood burning to her face and made her heart leap.

"Lyra, that marriage was no marriage at all. It was a mock one, planned and carried out with devilish cunning by Chandos. The man who performed the sham ceremony was not a clergyman. His name was Rawdon—a school-master. He is dead. But before he died he told Martin and me the whole business. You are not, never were—oh, thank God!—Chandos Armitage's wife!"

The blood ebbed from her face and left it deathly white. Sudden joy and relief go near killing sometimes.

"Not—not his wife! Then—then—"

She crimsoned over face and neck as her eyes sought his, then dropped from his ardent gaze.

"Yes," he whispered, answering her look—"yes, you are my wife, Lyra—mine!"

"Why, you are wet—all wet, Dane!" she exclaimed suddenly. "My face; my dress are wet! Oh! what has happened?"

He laughed. His eyes were bright with his regained happiness.

"I fell in the water," he said.

"Dane, tell me the truth. Oh, Dane, don't let us conceal anything from each other, never again—never again!"

"Well," he admitted, shamefacedly, "I went in after Chandos, who was drowning, and—"

She shuddered at the sound of his name, and from that day Dane never mentioned it in her hearing again.

"And—and you saved him?" she breathed.

He nodded slowly.

"Yes. I know I ought to be ashamed of myself, as Griffith has remarked more than once, but—"

She wound her arms round his neck and pressed her lips to his in a passionate, worshiping kiss.

"Oh, Dane, Dane! how noble you are! How—how I love you!"

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

ST. AUBYN did not put in an appearance at the cottage until past noon the following day. As he came into the garden, Dane rose from the arbor seat, where he had been sitting with Lyra, and wrung his hand.

There was no need for St. Aubyn to ask if "all were well." One glance at Dane's face told that the two were once more united.

"How is Lady Dane?" he asked, as if he had come to pay an ordinary morning call.

Dane linked his arm in St. Aubyn's and led him to Lyra.

She was still rather pale, but that awful look which had haunted St. Aubyn had disappeared from her face, and as she gave him her hand, something of her old, happy smile shone in her eyes, mingled with a tender gratitude.

"See for yourself," said Dane.

St. Aubyn's tact and manner were perfect. As if nothing whatever had happened, completely ignoring the tragic incidents of the previous day, he took Lyra's hand, returned its warm pressure, and then sat down beside her and talked of the beauty and richness of Devonshire scenery, filling Lyra's heart with gratitude and Dane with admiration.

Quite calmly and naturally, St. Aubyn did all the talking, and sat smoking and chatting for half an hour, then rose, like an ordinary afternoon visitor, to take his departure.

"Come back to dinner, old fellow," said Dane, just as he had said at Rome, at London, at Highfield scores of times.

"Yes, yes," said Lyra, in a low voice and with eager eyes—"please!"

"Thank you, I shall be very glad," returned St. Aubyn, just as usual.

Dane went with him to the gate and on to the river-bank, and when out of sight of Lyra he held out his hand, and looking straight into St. Aubyn's eyes, said in a low voice shaken by emotion:

"What am I to say to you, St. Aubyn?"

"Nothing," said St. Aubyn.

Dane grasped his hand tightly.

"She has told me all," he said.

"Yes?" said St. Aubyn, meeting his gaze unflinchingly.

"I knew that she would, or I shouldn't have told her. It is for you to say whether you blame me—wish to cut me—"

Dane put his hand on his shoulder.

"Cut you? God bless you, old fellow!" His eyes grew dim. "What a friend you have been to us! What! do you think I am such a blind idiot as not to understand that your affection for her is an honor to her, and to me, too? Do you think she doesn't feel that? St. Aubyn, you have been the truest friend a man ever had; and if"—his voice broke—"if I could tell you what I feel; but I can't, and it's no use trying."

"All right," said St. Aubyn, using Dane's favorite phrase as he grasped his hand. "We won't say any more."

The two men walked along the river-side in a silence more eloquent than words; then suddenly the sight of the sand-bank glittering in the sunshine recalled the scene of last night to Dane. He started.

"What about that scoundrel—what have you done with him?" he asked, slowly.

"We took him to the hotel and put him to bed," said St. Aubyn, gravely. "He was very bad—"

Dane muttered something.

"Very bad, half delirious, in fact; but I think it was the result of some brandy he got from the waiter as much as his ducking. Martin has taken him up to town to-day." He paused and lighted a cigarette. "He seems to have caught a chill yesterday. Heaven and that wild man of the woods, Griffith, only knows how long he had been in the water, Chandos says 'hours.' Anyway, he is a perfect wreck. I fancy our villainous friend is given to excessive alcohol, and that he was not in training, so to speak, for yesterday's per-



formance. Last night he repeated his confession, and, I think, perhaps for the first time in his life, he told the truth."

"Martin has gone with him?"

"Yes," said St. Aubyn. "Dane, Martin Fanshawe has given me a better opinion of parsons than, I am ashamed to say, I have ever had before. To see him beside that wretch's bed, exhorting him, praying over him! Well, Martin's a good fellow and a good Christian, and that sums it up. I ventured to express my sense of his goodness, and he remarked that if you, whom the scoundrel had so wronged, injured, could risk your life to save his, the least he, Martin, could do, as a clergyman, was to try and save his soul. I wanted to express a doubt that Chandos *had* a soul, but I forbore. Martin sends his love to Lady Dane, and—"

He paused.

"Go on," said Dane.

"Well, he said that if you asked his advice—which was not probable—he should recommend you to take her away for a change. Somewhere on the Continent—anywhere where she could forget that scoundrel and all his works."

"Martin is right; he always is. I must take her away," said Dane. "But don't think that Lyra is ill or broken down. No." He smiled with profound satisfaction. "I've proved to her that it was all my fault."

"All your fault?" said St. Aubyn, rather startled, notwithstanding his warm regard for Lyra.

"Yes, certainly. Wouldn't you do so if you were in my place?"

St. Aubyn smiled.

"Yes, certainly," he assented, promptly. "Of course I should."

"Well, then!" said Dane. "But, as I said before, don't you think that she is going to be ill? She's all right, as you'll see when you come to dinner to-night. But all the same, we'll go abroad for a bit. By George!" he flushed and smiled, "it will be a second honey-moon."

That modern saint, in a long black coat and white choker, Martin Fanshawe, took Chandos to town. Either his long bath or his terror had played havoc with the accomplished scoundrel; and notwithstanding the best of medical advice, and the unremitting attention of a first-class nurse, the Honorable Mr. Chandos grew exceedingly ill. The doctor hinted that a long but secret course of indulgence in alcohol had so undermined Mr. Chandos's constitution that the shock and consequent fever might end fatally. "Of course, while there

was life" there was hope," etc., etc. Day by day Chandos grew weaker. He was an extremely interesting invalid, and the nurse, who, it is true, did not know anything of his antecedents, was quite charmed with him.

Clad in a dressing-gown of soft peach silk, he lay, or sat, propped up by pillows, and discoursed "Shakespeare and the musical glories" by the turn together. Sometimes he amused himself by composing "sonnets" and "lyrics," or sketching "impressions," as of old, and at first he seemed quite happy and contented, as a man whose conscience is at rest should be.

But as he grew still weaker, the air of complacency began to leave him. He had "bad quarters of an hour," sighed and groaned in his sleep, and grew anxious-eyed.

One day Martin came up to see him. A glance at the wasted face and shrunken eyes, with their unnatural glossy sheen, told Martin that Chandos was nearing the end of a life which had been half farce and half tragedy.

"Well, Fanshawe," said Chandos, with a flicker of his superior and condescending smile, "you have come to see me before I pass beyond 'these garish lights,' as poor Dickens said at his last reading."

Martin looked gravely at him.

"I hope you are not so ill as you think, Chandos."

Chandos eyed him half stealthily.

"I am dying," he said, with a sudden note of suppressed terror in his voice—"I'm dying, and you know it! They all know it—the doctor and the nurse—though they try to keep it from me. Look at my arm." He drew the silken sleeve back and held up the wasted limb. "You see? Three days ago there was blood on my handkerchief after I'd coughed. Yes, I'm dying!"

His lips quivered, and he looked from side to side, with a hunted expression on his hatchet-like face.

"I fear it is so," said Martin, solemnly. "Chandos, knowing, as you do, that you are near—"

"No, no," broke in the querulous voice. "Don't preach to me, Fanshawe. Sermons are all very well in a nice church, with a surpliced choir and good music, but—but without the proper accompaniment they—they jar upon me."

"My poor fellow!" said Martin, with pity and not anger. "Think, Chandos! God has given you time for repentance!"

"Thanks—thanks," said Chandos, as if he were declining some invalid dainty which he did not want. "It is very good of you. But repentance! Now, I doubt whether any man really repents. I doubt—" His endeavor to keep up the tone

of bantering cynicism broke down suddenly, and clutching Martin's arm, he said in quite a different voice: "Fanshawe I—I want to see Dane!"

"To see Dane?"

"Yes," said Chandos, his eyes wandering restlessly round the room. "I—I want to know whether"—he tried to smile, as if he were ashamed of his emotion, but the smile was a ghastly one—"I want to know whether *she* forgives me!"

"Be assured of that," said Martin, in a low voice. "Lyra is too true a Christian to harbor resentment. She has forgiven you long since, or she would not be so perfectly happy as she is."

"You think so?" said Chandos, uneasily and doubtfully.

"It seems impossible—impossible!"

"Not for her—not for Lyra," responded Martin. "You had her forgiveness long since. Seek now the forgiveness of Heaven—"

"Yes, yes; but—but I want to see Dane; I want to hear him say that—that she forgives me. Ask him to come to me. I—I don't think he'll refuse. He"—he turned his head away—"he saved my life—or tried to do so. Tell him that I'm dying, that I shall never trouble him after this—" A fit of coughing stopped him, and Martin saw that the handkerchief was flecked with blood.

Dane was on the point of starting for the Continent with Lyra, but he came up immediately on receipt of Martin's telegram.

Chandos was much weaker, but was still propped up amidst his pillows. The bed was strewn with writing and sketching materials, and his guitar, with its pale-blue ribbons, lay within reach. A flush spread over his thin face as Dane entered.

"So you've come," he said. "I—I thought you would. It's—it's lovely weather, isn't it? I'm—I'm busy, as usual, you see;" he waved his weak, trembling hand to the litter on the bed. "I've just been knocking off a—a few verses to—to Autumn." He rolled his eyes, and simperingly repeated:

"When Autumn tints the brittle leaves,  
Death hovers near to claim its sheaves;  
They fall like ghosts—"

He broke off suddenly and looked with a terrible anxiety in Dane's face. "Dane, I sent for you to ask you if—if—she had really forgiven me—I *must* know the truth. Fanshawe says 'yes;' but these parsons, and nurses, and doctors are not to be depended on. They 'humor the patient,' eh? Tell me,



Dane, and tell the truth, for God's sake. I can't sleep, I can't rest, for thinking of her. She comes to my bedside—there"—he pointed a skinny finger—"there, she is standing there now! She looks as she looked that day in—in the church"—he shuddered and hid his eyes in his hand as if to shut out the vision—"I shall see her, hear her voice, just when I'm dying, unless—unless I'm sure she has forgiven me!"

Dane took his hand. I will not say that it did not cost Dane an effort, or that he did not shudder as his fingers came in contact with Chandos's wasted claw; but he held the hand firmly.

"Set your mind at rest, Chandos," he said, gravely, earnestly. "Lyra has forgiven you wholly, fully. She told me to tell you so."

Chandos drew a long sigh of relief.

"Thank you, Dane. It's—it's like her. Oh"—he groaned, and his head dropped on his breast—"what a beast I have been!"

After this his mind seemed to wander, and lifting his head, he looked at Dane with a ghostly smile.

"Neatly done, wasn't it?" he muttered, plucking at the coverlid with nervous fingers. "Rawdon out of the way—fear will keep *his* tongue quiet—there is no witness to prove anything, even if they charged me. She thinks I'm her husband. I've saved that money, too. No; I forgot. It's gone. That drunken beast of a sailor had my coat on when he slipped over the quay. What' Dane's wife? Lord! what a comedy!"

Dane bore it like a man, and stood silent and motionless, while, for nearly a quarter of an hour, Chandos rambled through his villainy.

At last his voice died away, and he looked at Dane with returning intelligence.

"You're here still?" he said. "I—I wish you'd go now. I've—I've got what I want, and"—he looked from side to side restlessly, then dropped back on the pillow—"and you disturb me."

Dane relinquished his hand.

"Good-bye, Chandos!" he said, solemnly.

The eyes—fearfully like a monkey's in their glittering restlessness—were lifted to Dane's.

"Eh? Good-bye—good-bye!"

" "When autumn tints the brittle leaves  
Death—"

Dane went softly from the room, much more impressed and moved than if he had found the dying man raving violently. Chandos died that night.

---

Nearly ten months later, on a particularly bright summer afternoon, there was a great stir and bustle at Starminster.

In the house itself servants were hurrying to and fro, as if engaged in some tremendous and all-important preparations. Outside, flags were flying, and an eager and excited crowd of villagers, with flowers in their button-holes and in the bosoms of their dresses, looked and laughed with anticipatory enjoyment.

A huge marquee reared itself proudly on the lawn, and the local brass band discoursed sweet and noisy music. Children, dressed in their Sunday best, were roving and running all over the place.

At first sight, "the intelligent observer" would have said that these signs portended a wedding, but for once "the intelligent observer" would have been mistaken. It was a christening, and this gathering of all the clans was to celebrate the naming of Lord and Lady Dane's first-born, their son and heir.

Three o'clock was the hour fixed for the ceremony, which Martin was to perform in the ivy-grown chapel in the grounds; but long before that the villagers, and not only the villagers, but the tenants and the people from the nearest town, had thronged the lawn, only too delighted to testify by their presence to the unqualified popularity of Lord and Lady Dane.

It was distinctly and emphatically a day of rejoicing. After the christening there were to be some athletic sports; after the sports a dinner, to which all were welcome, and after the dinner a dance on the lawn, a dance which was to continue till the moon had dipped behind the hills beyond the park.

I suppose in the great and good time coming such a gathering, such a scene will be impossible. Well, "the old order changeth, giving place to the new;" but for artistic and other reasons, the disappearance of the old feudalism will be regretted. Anyway, the old order was in fine force that day. There was not a man, woman or child who did not feel as if they had a part and lot in the matter. It was almost as if Lady Dane's child were their child, Dane and his wife's happiness their happiness; and every face was decked with smiles as the hour of three approached, and the big crowd gathered with one accord at the bottom of the flight of steps leading to the house.

As the clock struck, a group of persons emerged from the hall and stood looking down at the crowd.

First came Dane and Lyra and the earl, for the old man, though he leaned with his right hand on his sixpenny oak stick, held Lyra's arm with his left.

At sight of them the crowd set up a loud cheer, and cries of "Long live the earl, long live Lord and Lady Dane," rose heartily.

Very beautiful and very happy Lyra looked that day, and there was some excuse for the proud smile with which Dane glanced at his wife as he raised his hat in response to the cheers.

Close behind them came Martin and Theodosia and St. Aubyn.

A cheer greeted them also, for the crowd knew, in a vague way, that Lord and Lady Dane had gone through some trouble, and that the calm, pleasant-looking man with the iron-gray hair had proved a true friend; and Mr. Fanshawe was also known and respected.

But when, immediately behind them, Mary—that most important personage, "baby's nurse"—appeared with the precious infant in her arms, a roar of delight welcomed her and made her honest face turn crimson.

"Lawks sake! they'll wake the darling," she said to Griffith, who limped beside her; and she rocked and crowed to the baby in the accepted fashion.

The crowd made a lane for the principal performers in the ceremony to pass through, and the children, admirably drilled and marshaled by the school-master, strewed the path with flowers which, in honor of the baby, were all of white.

Slowly, to the music of the brass band which proudly led the van, the procession made its way to the church.

It was too small to hold all who were present, but all who could crowded and squeezed their way in; and presently, as the organ poured out its music, Martin came down the aisle, clad in his white surplice, his usually grave face softened by the rare smile which, so his wife declared, made him look like a saint.

In deep, impressive tones he commenced the familiar service. The congregation listened reverently; but a stir, the stir of suppressed excitement, ran through them when Martin said, "Name this child," and St. Aubyn, stepping forward, said, in a low but clear voice that could be heard by all:

"St. Aubyn Dane."

To the delight of all present the baby smiled placidly until



the water fell on its face, then it uttered the proper cry—one cry only—and was immediately seized and hushed by Mary.

The crowd poured out of the church and made its way to the marquee, in which awaited them a dinner that afforded a topic of conversation for many a year after. Toward the close of the meal, Dane and Lyra, with the earl, St. Aubyn, Martin and Theodosia, entered the huge tent, and a cheer that was more like a roar welcomed them.

With the color coming and going on her lovely face, Lyra clung to her husband's arm and looked round with a smile upon the friendly faces all turned toward her.

The old earl touched her on the shoulder.

"Give me your arm, my dear," he said.

She took his hand and drew it within her arm, and lifting his gray head proudly, the old man raised his voice.

"You do not need to be told, friends and neighbors, that you are welcome!"

"No, no!" was the responsive shout. "Long live the earl!"

The old man smiled.

"Say, rather, long live his son and grandson," he said. "I am an old man, friends, but my old age has been blessed, not only by a son and daughter to cheer me with their love"—he raised Lyra's hand to his lips, and the action was greeted by a frantic cheer—"but by a grandson who will, I trust, not only inherit my name, but your friendship and love, which are dearer to me than any empty title."

"The earl, health and long life to him!" some one shouted.

"No, no," said the old man. "Drink to the health of my son and daughter."

"No," said Lyra; and low and trembling as her voice was, it reached every ear.

There was rather an awkward pause. But one man was equal to the emergency. St. Aubyn, who had stood at a modest distance surveying the proceedings with a pleasant smile, here stepped forward, and catching up a glass, raised it above his head.

"Long life and happiness to St. Aubyn Dane!" he cried.

The happy inspiration was accepted and acted upon with unanimous promptitude, and as every one sprung to his feet, the cry, "Long life and happiness to St. Aubyn Dane!" rent the air.

The Mill Cottage still stands; but it is now the center of a large and thriving farm, of which its owner, Griffith, is justly

proud. But he is still prouder of the fact that every year in May, when Devonshire is at its best, Lady Dane and her children take up their quarters there. For a couple of weeks the happy children, and their no less happy mother, roam and romp unchecked by the banks of the shining Taw, and up the valley in which "father taught mother to fish for trout."

Dane is always with them on these visits, and not seldom St. Aubyn joins the party. He is quite gray now, and looks considerably older than Dane; but sadness and melancholy have long since left him.

What man can be melancholy or brood over past misery while he is surrounded by half a dozen bright-eyed children, who are never so happy as when they have Uncle 'Byn to play with them; or, better still, when, clustering at his knee, they had persuaded him to tell them not one, but a score of stories? They are never too rough, never too noisy for him, though often the mother gently chides them, and offers to rescue him from their assaults.

"Let them alone, Lady Dane," he always says, as he puts the arms of the last mite round his neck, or hoists it firmly on to his shoulder. "Somebody has told them that I'm fond of them, and it's too late to persuade them that they are mistaken. Let them alone."

THE END.

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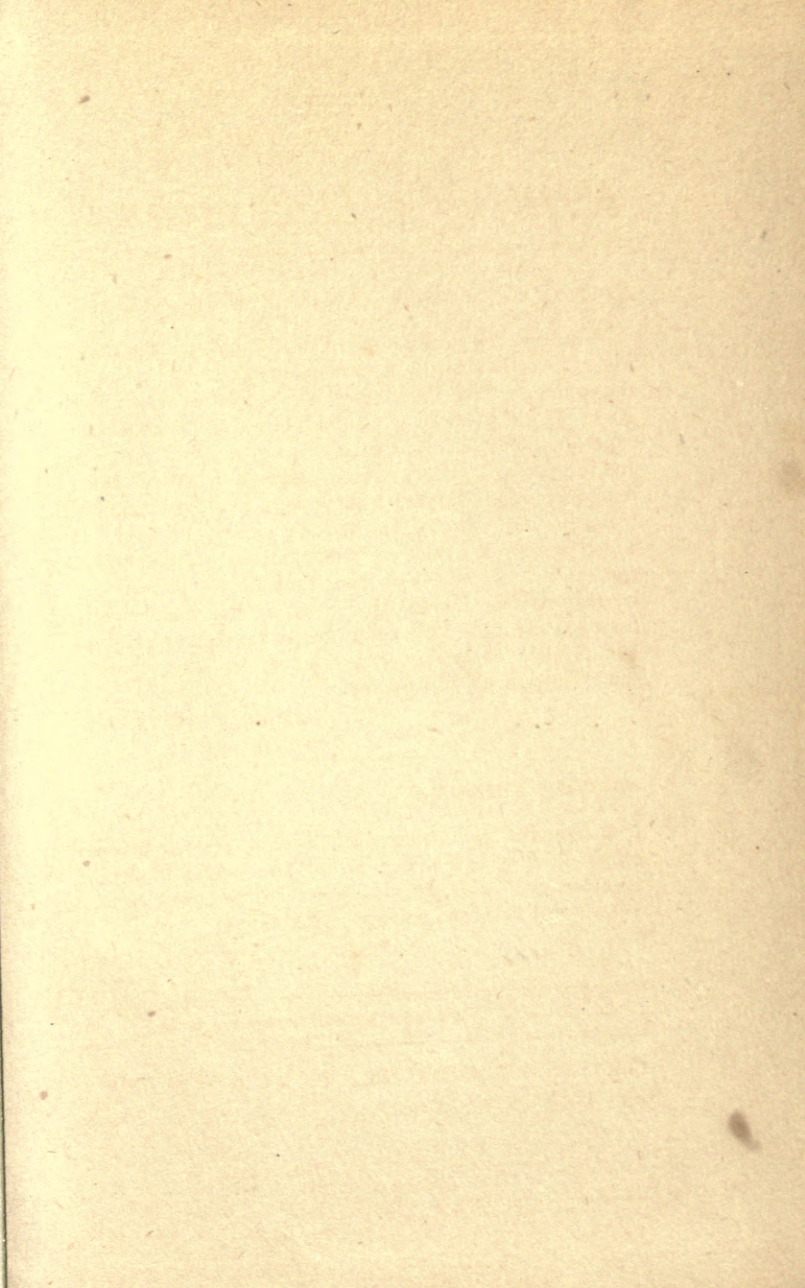
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